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CROWS NEST FARM

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CROW'S NEST FARM.

CROW'S NEST FARM.

A TRUE TALE.

BY JULIA ADDISON,

AUTHOR OF 'EVELYN LASCELLES,' 'SISTER KATE,' 'EFFIE VERNON,' ETC., ETC.

"Every truth is a moral."

SIR E. B. LYTTON.

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PREFACE.

THE incidents and characters in this tale are faithfully drawn from real life; the simple heroes and heroines having been well known to the Author, or to her family, for years.

Amongst the farmers and peasantry in remote country localities, where reading and writing are little cultivated, events of domestic interest are often handed down to the younger descendants, with the minuteness and accuracy of ancient oral tradition; which was the case in the present instance.

Some slight change in names and places has been made, but all embellishment or deviation from fact strictly avoided; so that what value the story possesses lies in its truth—of which

it may be said, in the words of the accomplished Mademoiselle de Launay, "Le vrai est comme il peut; et n'a de mérite que d'être ce qu'il est."

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CROW'S NEST FARM.

CHAPTER I.

THE PATRIARCH AND HIS FAMILY.

"My wife . . . prided herself upon being an excellent contriver in housekeeping. My children . . . as they were educated without softness, so they were at once well formed and healthy; my sons hardy and active, my daughters beautiful and blooming. The little circle . . . promised to be the support of my declining age."—*Vicar of Wakefield.*

In the kitchen of one of those snug farmhouses of which England has so many, a farmer and his wife, of the old-fashioned style (for we are speaking of some five-and-thirty years ago), were sitting over their supper of home-fed bacon and good home-brewed ale, surrounded by a troop of sons and daughters of various sizes, from the tall

grown-up lad and womanly girl, to chubby-cheeked boys of eight and nine,—a portion of their offspring only, for several smaller children had been despatched to bed. The father and mother of this somewhat patriarchal family (there were no less than nine in all, with the prospect of another) were still in the prime of life, for, on the principle probably that extremes meet, the lower classes—and this worthy couple had begun life as labourers—like royalty, marry early, and their eldest daughter, that fine modest-looking young woman with soft eyes and quickly varying colour, who is cutting bread for the rest, is but seventeen. To say that Mr. Howard's face was in hue like one of his own Ribstone pippins, would be to use a somewhat hackneyed simile, yet one not inapplicable—that peculiar streaky red on a clear ground, with just sufficient lines and indentations to mark its maturity, was imitated by his cheek, as was the rich brown snuff of the apple by his abundant curly hair, while his blue eyes seemed to look kindly and pleasantly on the world, as the world had hitherto looked

on him. He was rather small and spare, and stooped a little. He wore a snuff-coloured coat, a white neck-handkerchief scrupulously clean, knee-breeches, blue stockings, and gaiters. His wife was of a more anxious temperament, with a tendency to worry both herself and others: she was thin, and had a drawn, careworn expression on her homely features; she was a well-meaning woman, with a resolute will, and her frequent reproach to her husband was that he "took things too easy." She possessed many small but useful virtues, such as order, punctuality, and activity. In person she was unvaryingly neat, with lilac cotton gown, motherly cap, and large white apron.

Supper was half-finished when a light tap with a walking-stick at the door was followed by the entrance of a comely-looking young farmer of about five-and-twenty, in top-boots, dark blue coat, and gay-coloured cravat carefully tied, his light hair brushed on one side from his ruddy, pleasant face,—altogether what would now be called a "great swell" in his way.

"Oh, Mr. Dancer, I'm glad to see you," said Mrs. Howard, rising and setting him a chair, with a smile of unusual sweetness.

"You see I've been to London to-day," observed Mr. Dancer; "and here 's something for Nancy."

"Ann, where are you?" said the mother, looking round for her eldest daughter. But Ann had disappeared.

"Ann, Ann! come down!" cried Mrs. Howard, in tones of ill-disguised anger, at the foot of the stairs; for, as she rightly guessed, Ann had gone to her own room, not to make any feminine adornments or alterations in her dress, but to escape from the presence of an unwelcome lover who was warmly encouraged by her mother, Mrs. Howard's great ambition being to see Ann, Mrs. James Dancer. It would be a great match for the girl; Dancer was much superior to her father in position and wealth. True, they were both farmers, but with a wide margin of difference. Farmer Howard had by great industry contrived to rent and

cultivate Crow's Nest, a little farm of a few acres, which he was gradually improving; Farmer Dancer had inherited a goodly possession of land in high cultivation, which had been in the family for some generations, with a house which that of the Howards might have been swung round in. Where Howard kept two or three horses, Dancer kept twenty, and so on; therefore it was a condescension on his part (as the world goes) to take notice of Ann, and nothing but the girl's extreme beauty, and his being heartily in love with her, would (it was supposed) have made him single her out.

To see her as she came down in obedience to her mother's summons, her fair face a little flushed, a profusion of golden brown hair clustering in natural curls all round her head, a half-shy, half-startled expression in her clear hazel eyes and delicate features, her tall figure, with its finely-formed bust and round white arms, it seemed no wonder that she had turned the opulent farmer's head; she might have done the same to wiser men; whilst there was an air of

modesty and purity about her calculated to secure respect as well as admiration.

There was a mixture of both in Mr. Dancer's manner as he presented his offerings, a bright pink ribbon, a bag full of fine oranges, which made the eyes of the young brothers glisten, and two handsomely-bound books. These last seemed to find the most favour with Ann; she peeped into them as if unable to resist doing so, though evidently reluctant to accept any of the gifts; the ribbon was taken up by her mother admiringly; the oranges Ann quickly distributed among the boys and girls, with, "Here, Sally; here, Charlotte; here, catch this, Will!" Then, while Mr. Dancer was speaking to her father, she again slipped out of the room, saying, "Now, mother, I'll go and get the wood in for firing."

"You see I have planned to take Ann a nice drive to-morrow," he was saying, "to see my married sister. She'd enjoy it, and I could call for her after breakfast."

"That she would!" exclaimed Mrs. Howard.

"How kind of you, sir! Ann—where is she? —gone again—Ann, Ann, come here, you stupid!" The two last words were added in an emphatic whisper, and accompanied by a shake of her daughter's shoulder, as she captured the unwilling Ann, and brought her out of the back-kitchen. "Mr. Dancer's a-going to take you a beautiful drive to-morrow," she added aloud.

"I can't go, thank you, sir, all the same," said Ann, firmly.

"Why not?" he asked pleadingly.

"I've got a deal of ironing to do, and—and besides, I don't want to go, sir."

"Ann, Ann," said her mother, "I'm surprised at you!"

"Perhaps another day would suit you better?" suggested Dancer.

"No, sir." And Ann shook her pretty head, and, like a timid animal to which resistance is a painful effort, she a third time took shelter in flight.

The crestfallen Dancer took up his hat and stood tapping with his stick.

"She's shy, sir, that's what it is," said the mother, apologetically. "She's young, sir, and them young things doesn't know their own minds. Pray don't be offended, sir."

"Oh no, Mrs. Howard, not at all; but you know it's rather discouraging when——"

He stopped and looked round at the boys, who were rapidly devouring his oranges. John, the eldest, a gentle, rather delicate-looking youth of sixteen, with soft fair hair and large liquid blue eyes, who stood a little apart from the rest, and had too much natural good breeding to eat the farmer's oranges in his presence, looked sorry for the disappointed lover, but did not speak. Dancer was kind and friendly to him; indeed, the farmer was a favourite with all the family excepting Ann; and she, probably, in any character but that of lover, would have liked him very well, for he was frank, generous, and good-natured.

"I say, put in a good word for me with your sister, John, won't you? there's a good fellow!" said the farmer.

"I'm afraid it ain't of no use, sir," John answered gently.

Dancer looked wistfully at him. "No use! Why?"

"I can't say, sir, only I'm afraid it ain't."

"Not know her own mind!" muttered the lad to himself as he watched the farmer's broad figure disappear through the kitchen door. "Law bless me, she knows her own mind well enough; and mother, *she* knows as she knows it too!"

With which not very lucid or grammatical remark, John retreated to bed.

CHAPTER II.

THE ACCEPTED LOVER.

"And a winning tongue had he."
The Banks of Allan Water.

ANN HOWARD'S brother was quite right when he said that she knew her own mind on the subject of lovers. As she lay thinking for a few minutes that night by the side of her young sister—Ann worked too hard to lie awake long—there rose before her a little scene that had taken place more than a year ago between her and the son of a brickmaker—one Isaac Askew, who, riding past a gate in a green lane near which she was standing, had politely addressed her as "young woman," and requested her to open it. She complied, looking, as she did so, at the glossiest black hair and the brightest pair of blue-grey eyes she had ever seen in her life,

whilst her gaze was returned with interest, and a clear, manly voice was heard to say, "That's my wife, if ever I have one."

A few days afterwards Sarah and Harriet, Askew's two youngest sisters, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked girls, had sought her acquaintance by calling to ask her to walk out with them, and during the walk had been joined by their brother, whom they (of course) introduced to Ann. These walks were often repeated; they led to Ann's being invited in to tea with her new friends, who lived with their father and mother at a house called the Kiln. From that time constant invitations were given to the girl; one day it would be that there was a goose for dinner, so Ann must come and partake; or her advice, or opinion, or presence was particularly wanted for some reason or other. Ann knew that Isaac admired and loved her, though her visits and regard were nominally bestowed on his sisters. She continued to take walks with them whenever she could spare time; Isaac was sure to be of the party; a long ramble was pro-

posed for the morrow, and Ann's last thought as she closed her eyes was that she must be up early in the morning to finish some holland pinafores she was making for her future sisters-in-law—for the girls, though nice-looking and good-natured, were not over tidy, and Ann, always trim and neat, felt ashamed to walk out with them in their ordinary half-fine, half-dirty costume. Isaac himself was smart enough; there was no lack of money in the family; but some persons, as we well know, are innately untidy, as others are the reverse; and Ann thought her neat, clean, large pinafores would cover all deficiencies.

It would surprise many a farmer's daughter in these days, whose mother and a servant-girl save her all the work except some light ironing or a few housemaid's duties, to see the varied and constant labour that in Ann's youth devolved on a young woman in her position. True she did not learn a little French, or play the pianoforte, or pass her afternoons in crochêt or embroidery; but she had a good plain educa-

tion, was no less genteel-looking, and far more healthy, than her more luxurious sisters of the present day. She was the eldest daughter, and if, on that account, she had some few privileges, she was, on the other hand, by far the most hard-worked and hardworking person in the family. It was she who baked, washed, ironed, kept the house from top to bottom as clean as a palace—possibly cleaner than many palaces—who mended the children's clothes, and saw that they never went out unwashed or uncombed, besides the occasional supervision of pig-killing, when she would cut up, cure, and salt the meat; she manufactured ginger, grape, and other wines; yet she got through all briskly and cheerfully, as though it was nothing at all; and sometimes, in her neat cotton gown, white "tippet," and straw hat, would, after bringing in wood for the fires, set off to the public-house a mile distant, armed with a portly stone-bottle, to bring ale for the supper. Ann liked these occasional walks through the lane, shady in summer, crisp with frost in winter; even if muddy and

wet, she, with her strong though neat leather shoes and warm woollen shawl, cared not for weather. The boys were at work or at school; her sisters young; her mother sufficiently occupied with the cooking, and the cares of a rapidly increasing family. Ann never recollected her mother—indeed could not have imagined her—without a baby in arms and another "wee-tot toddling at the knee." It seemed Mrs. Howard's normal condition. By seven or eight o'clock she was free to join the young Askews, who were eagerly expecting her. The girls willingly accepted Ann's little offering of the pinafores, though that morning they had been to market on two of their father's horses, in grand green cloth habits and black beaver bonnets. Their stout limbs and buxom faces, of the regular glowing brunette order, formed no bad contrast to the more delicate beauty of the fair-cheeked Ann; and as the latter walked shyly but happily beside the trim and handsome Isaac, in his dark-green coat and cherry-coloured necktie—or let us say handkerchief, for "ties" were un-

known in those days—loosely knotted round his throat, and swinging his knobbed stick with a genteel, off-hand, captivating air, peculiar to himself, Sarah exclaimed, as she and her sister obligingly fell into the background, "Well, I'm blessed!"—meaning, one would suppose by the context, the opposite to blessed—"I'm blessed if Nan and Ikey ain't as pretty a couple as I'd wish to clap eyes on!"

"Ikey don't seem in the best of tempers, though," said the second Miss Askew; "but perhaps he'll make it all right with Nan to-day, if we give 'em the chance. I should like her for a sister-in-law, blessed if I shouldn't."

It was soon evident to the gentle Ann that her admirer's mood was not amiable.

"I say, Ann, what does that fellow Dancer come prowling about your place for?"—he had commenced with an ominous scowl, when the individual in question came trotting up on a bright bay nag. He stopped on seeing Ann, bowing and smiling. Askew sulkily drew back. The

farmer exchanged a few words with Ann, bowing civilly to Isaac after he had bid her good-bye; but Isaac would not appear to see him, although his jealous eyes had watched, and his jealous ears listened for, every gesture, every word, of that brief interview. When Dancer was gone the young brickmaker's temper was at boiling-point; and Isaac Askew's ill-temper was no joke. Gloomy, melancholy, and reckless, he choked back his feelings for a time; till at length Ann, who thought even a violent explosion better than this smouldering blackness, timidly asked what was the matter.

"Matter!" he muttered, while lowering glances shot like lurid lightning from his eyes. "I wish that wretch was at the ——. You entices him all as ever you can, you do, you ——, and then pretends you doesn't! Call him back, and I'll go—I'm not wanted, that's clear.'

His face was pale, almost livid, with passion.

"I don't entice him; he's nothing to me," said Ann.

"Why don't you give him the sack then?"

"I've nothing to give him the sack for, as I've often told you; there isn't anything between us, and won't ever be."

"I don't believe it!" cried Isaac. "You are enough to drive a man mad, you are, you artful young hussy. You make me so mad I don't care what I do, nor what becomes of me! Let me alone,"—as Ann attempted to lay her hand on his arm; and shaking her off, he seemed like some wild animal on the point of flying from her. Poor Ann trembled and turned pale, looking at him with wistful, anxious eyes. Her mute appeal was not without effect. He drew nearer, with a somewhat softened air.

"I say, my girl," he began, passionate tenderness gleaming through his rough words, "I shall never have any one if I don't have you; I've made my mind up to that. Do you think you could be happy with me? I'd do everything I could to make you so." Then, after a pause, he continued,—"You know what I earn,

and, if you think you could do better than that, I don't want to stand in your way."

"I don't say but what I like you very well, Isaac," faltered Ann, as he paused for her answer, while her face was more eloquent than her words; "if mother——"

"Oh, your mother won't object," he interrupted quickly. "Of course, as you know, I am foreman to my father, and he would allow me a pound a week, and a house to live in. I think we could do pretty well upon that, don't you, Nancy?—that is, if you are in the same mind as I am."

"Isaac," said Ann, with tears in her eyes, "I could be happy with you in the humblest cot, ay, even if it were no bigger than a pigsty, so long as I had you."

This avowal, although not made in remarkably poetic language, sounded pretty enough in the sweet voice and from the delicate lips of the farmer's young daughter; and Isaac, taking advantage of the screen afforded by a clump of

evergreens in the little copse through which they were passing, clasped her in his arms, and thanked her by a shower of ardent kisses. Then, as she hung on his arm, followed a long happy talk, in which all past misunderstandings were explained away, and Isaac, fully satisfied on the subject of the obnoxious Dancer, was profuse in promises of faithfulness and professions of never-changing love. When the considerate sisters joined the couple, a few minutes before reaching Ann's home, they saw, even before they were told in words, that Isaac had "made it all right" with his companion.

CHAPTER III.

THE REJECTED LOVER.

"All these, all these are thine,
If thou wilt be mine, love, if thou wilt be mine."

Fairy Tempter.

"Oh whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad."

Scotch Song.

In the course of a few days James Dancer expressed his intentions towards Ann Howard in due form. He had more than hinted for some time past that he intended to make her his wife if she would have him, so that the formal proposal produced no surprise, though much joy, to all but the girl herself. As we have before said, she disliked him as a lover, and would not have accepted him even had Askew not been in the way; yet he offered what might have tempted many a girl in a higher position of life; his were no doubtful allure-

ments, unsubstantial like fairy gifts; he held forth no promises which might too soon prove of the nature of pie-crust, made to be broken, but solid, material realities, land, well-grown timber, fat cattle, a farmyard and dairy that might serve as models; his own robust, sober, kind, good-tempered self, with a heart that had never loved before, and now loved her undividedly.

"You are a lucky gal, Nancy," said her good father, giving her an affectionate slap on the shoulder. "But you deserve it—you've been a good gal to us. Hey! What's the matter?"

"I tell you, once for all, father and mother," said Ann, resolutely, "I will have nothing to do with Mr. Dancer. I hate him, and—and that's all about it!"

"Why Nance, my gal!" broke from her father, and a torrent of reproach from her more irritable mother.

"I won't have him," repeated Ann unmoved, "and nobody shan't make me!"

"You're a fool!" cried her mother, "a fool and a simpleton—you'll repent it some day."

The refusal was conveyed in a modified form to Dancer, with the intimation that Ann only wanted a little coaxing and a little bullying to make her accede. He tried repeatedly to make an impression on Ann, but met with the same steadfast denial. He was desperate. He suggested to her parents that he had met her with Isaac Askew, and that perhaps a preference for the young brickmaker might interfere with his own suit. This Mrs. Howard indignantly denied. That fellow! She was certain her daughter never had or could give him a thought. Ann was fond of the girls, his sisters, and went to see them. Isaac was a wild, drinking young chap. Her Ann even look at such a one! Impossible.

Not content with coming frequently to her father's house, Dancer would lay wait for Ann on every possible occasion. It happened in the merry month of May—

"May, with its choir of happy birds above;
May, whose least murmur wakes the world to love"—

—it happened that unusually warm weather and a thunderstorm turned all the beer at Crow's Nest sour, so that Ann's excursions to the public-house were daily. No nymph of old, pursued by uncongenial satyr, used more devices, or more taxed her swiftness of foot, than did our maiden to avoid her hated lover. She would fly over the fields, crouch behind hayricks, go a roundabout way, but all in vain. One evening, returning with the supper beer, warm and tired, and thinking herself this time safe, she came upon the farmer face to face.

"Deuce take your young eyes, you wench!" he cried, "you shall not pass me. I *will* have you, I WILL!"

Ann set down her beer and made a frantic dart, but he sprang from one side of the road to the other. He caught her arm, but she struggled so violently she set herself free.

"I'll make you marry me sooner or later," he cried with an oath.

"Oh sir, oh sir, let me go!" she said in accents of terror and entreaty. "Oh pray—Oh do!"

But he continued to cut off her retreat, while her disordered hair, the vivid flush on her cheeks, and her panting bosom, made her look lovelier than ever. At length, by dint of astonishing resolution and agility, she evaded him, and flew rather than ran to the house, screaming out "Father!"

Similar scenes to this occurred on many occasions; meantime she dared not make known at home her love for Askew. With time so fully occupied as hers, it was difficult to find any leisure for meeting him; and before another moon had waned, some of the neighbours and tradespeople had coupled their names together. "I wonder, Mrs. Howard," said one, "you should let your gal keep company with that young Askew—a rackety ne'er-do-well as he is." And another—"If Ann was my darter I'd chop her legs off, afore she should go along of Isaac." "So would I," quoth Dame Howard spitefully.

Ann, overhearing these and similar remarks, loved Isaac in her woman's heart all the more tenderly. If Isaac had been a little wild, he

would be steady as old Time when he married her. Had he not said so? She *must* meet him, and it seemed, from force of circumstances, their meetings must be clandestine. No time offered but the evening. When she had set the supper, and seen the rest of the family seated, she would say, "Now, I am going to chop the wood, which I was obliged to leave till last thing." And under this pretext she would go to the barn, and, after some vigorous chops (quite as often inflicted on the bare block as on the fuel), would steal to the gate of the farmyard at sound of a well-known whistle. These stolen moments with her lover were, as she has often avowed since, the sweetest of her life. It was necessary to keep up appearances, and presently her mother's voice at the house-door, calling out, "Ann! Ann! how long you are, chopping that wood! don't you want any supper?" would recall her to sublunary affairs, and—taking good care to run back to the barn before she answered—she would, after a few

energetic strokes with the bill, reply, "I'm a-going to bring it in, in a minute, mother. I don't want no supper." Then she would "put in an appearance" with an armful of faggots, and vanish again. The great fireplace, with dog-irons to support the wood logs, and its chimney-place the size of a small room, certainly required a good many faggots to kindle a fire in it; but after a time, whether some undue zeal in the cause attracted attention, or whether the low whistle had caught her father's quick ears, is not certain; but something induced him to watch the girl, and her evening trysts were discovered. Howard confidentially informed his wife, but was almost sorry afterwards that he had done so, for the Dame commenced a series of persecutions on the subject of Askew, which made poor Ann's life a burden to her. She was strictly forbidden even to speak to him; she was not allowed to go to church lest she should meet him; and that she might not be able to get out on Sunday—her most leisure day—her

best bonnet and other garments were locked up. Her petitions to go to church were vehement, but ineffectual.

"Unless," said the cunning Mrs. Howard, "you will take two of the little children with you. You know, as well as I do, that the last Sunday—ay, and two or three before that—that you went to church as you pretended, you were really taking a walk along with that scamp Askew. So now you may wear your rough week-a-day things, my lady!"

A few times, beneath a friendly sheltering hayrick, Ann—making herself look as nice as she could "in the rough"—contrived to have a brief interview with her beloved; but more often she would sit lonely in a barn, and cry, during the long Sunday afternoons, lamenting bitterly the cruel restraint to which she was subjected.

CHAPTER IV.

WOUNDS.

"'Tis painful, though 'tis sweet, to love."—KIRKE WHITE.

"Hers was love indeed; the love that cannot remember a fault when the object is in presence."—VIOLET.

ONE day, towards the close of summer, Isaac Askew was out with his brother, the latter shooting, or trying to shoot, small birds. Aiming at a sparrow which had taken refuge in a cherry-tree, the old gun hung fire. Isaac held out his impatient hand for the weapon, after seeing his brother make several ineffectual attempts to set it right, saying, with an oath, that *he* would make the thing go off. As he was handling it roughly and carelessly, swearing away at its "okkardness," as he termed it, the gun went off suddenly, blowing the rash young man's left-hand to pieces, and shattering the whole forearm. Be-

wildered and astonished, Isaac saw, as he expressed it, "his fingers fly one way and his thumb another." He walked into the house, his brother showing the most agitation of the two, and a surgeon was immediately sent for, who declared that the limb must be amputated without delay.

"As you please, sir," said Isaac, coolly; "it can be of no further use to me as it is. But this is the worst day's work I've ever done."

Isaac was strapped into a chair, and the operation performed. "However it may hurt," he observed to those around him, who were crying and lamenting, as the medical man was about to commence, "I don't mean to say so much as 'oh!' or 'ah!'"

Nor did he; but bore all—in those days there was no chloroform — with unflinching bravery.

Poor Ann was less brave when she heard what had happened. She turned pale, almost fainted, and could not repress her tears. How she longed to be with him, if but to say one

kind word! But it was impossible to get out; every pretext for leaving the house would, she knew, be suspected, and restraint put upon her movements, Mrs. Howard expressing neither sorrow nor regret for Isaac's accident. Indeed, she said, in her quick, snappish manner—"I don't wonder at it, that I don't; such a wicked fellow as that is! The blessed Lord is sure to punish such."

Not at all impressed with her mother's mode of "improving the occasion," Ann's heart overflowed towards the "wicked fellow" with double tenderness.

And so a week passed, and then Isaac's sister Sarah came to the farm with an urgent request from him that she would go down to the Kiln and let him speak to her. Fortunately, Ann thought, no one but herself saw Sarah; and a bright idea suggested itself, namely, that she would ask her mother to let her take the baby (one had been added to the family that summer) out for a long walk. This was acceded to; but the baby's walk terminated at the Kiln.

Isaac had just returned from the doctor's; he looked worn with pain and fever, and his arm—what remained of it—was in a sling.

"I sent for you, my girl," he said, much affected, "to tell you all is over between you and me now. If I don't die, I shall be a poor helpless cripple for life—no good to any one. Here, take my watch; I wish you to keep it, and——and goodbye, Nancy!"

He flung his head down on her shoulder; Ann could feel the hot tears falling like rain on her; sobs shook the strong young frame.

"It is bitter—bitter to part," he said, brokenly; "and for this cause"—and he ground his teeth and cursed the injured limb. "Oh! it maddens me! I love you more than I ever did. Oh! Ann, I do! God help me, I am miserable!"

"I won't take your watch, Isaac," Ann answered at length: "but if you'd got ne'er an arm at all I wouldn't forsake you. I love you all the better, and I 'll never have anybody else, let father and mother say what they may."

Fervent were the thanks and blessings Isaac

poured forth, joy unspeakable gleaming through his passionate sorrow, and he drew her towards him with his remaining arm. "Ah!" he said, "I shall be pointed at as a one-armed man; but what matter, since I shall have you for a wife!"

The baby-brother in Ann's arms now set up a cry. As she rocked the infant to and fro to still it, her cape slipped off. "What are those red marks on your neck, Ann?" asked Isaac, pushing back the golden hair that half concealed them.

"Oh, that's only where mother hit me," said Ann, blushing, and trying to draw her cape on again.

"What, has she been at that game?" cried Isaac, with rising colour. "Wicked old cat! And all for me! Ann, my poor dear child, do not stay at Crow's Nest to be ill-used like that. Come down to the Kiln. Father and mother loves you as if you were their own; so do sisters, —they've often said so. I'll speak to them."

His sisters now came in, and eagerly seconded

the proposal. "I know what father 'll say," urged Sarah; "he thinks there's nobody to be compared to Ann; so do I. Mother would do any blessed thing to please Isaac. Why, Nance *does* look worrited, poor gal!"

"I should think so," said Isaac; "such a life as they lead her at home. I say, Nancy, you'll step down again this evening?" (Ann had risen, saying she must go.) She dared not promise; she would if she could.

Circumstances favoured her, and she came. She refused, however, the offer to make a home at the Kiln, which was earnestly pressed upon her by every member of the family.

CHAPTER V.

THE CORN FIELD.

"Oh fair creature, in the light
Of common day so heavenly bright—
* * * *
With earnest feeling I shall pray
For thee when I am far away;
For never saw I form or face
In which more plainly I could trace
Benignity and home-bred sense,
Ripening in perfect innocence,
Here scattered like a random seed."

WORDSWORTH'S *Highland Mary.*

AND now rosy summer, with its sunny hayfields and blushing hedgerows, had departed, and a richer, fuller luxuriance was upon the earth. The crimson cherry shone through coronals of green leaves, the luscious plum glowed in purple bloom, golden and russet apples weighed down the drooping branches, the yellow corn rippled like the waves of the sea, as light breezes stirred

the sultry air, waxing mellower day by day, until the harvest was ripe, and it was time to put in the sickle.

A busy period was this at Crow's Nest Farm; and our heroine was, as usual, foremost in usefulness and activity. Farmer Howard would often beg for her assistance in the fields for a few hours, which was willingly given—often, indeed, she would contrive to work for him more than half the day. Nor was this all; in that part of the country reaping is done by the acre, or, as it is termed, "by the great," and whoever chose could, by working later or earlier than the rest, earn a considerable addition of wages. Many of the reapers would rise early for this purpose, and the indefatigable Ann amongst them. Many an autumn morning, rising with the earliest birds, her lithe form might be seen, reaping-hook in hand, cutting down handful after handful of golden ears, in a style worthy of the most experienced reaper in the field. Last harvest-time she had been often joined in these matutinal labours by Isaac, who

would take her sickle for an hour or so whilst she rested; she sighed as she thought of him now, but she must not relax her exertions—she has a motive in this extra and self-imposed toil. Her father—although in the day she worked for nothing—paid her for this additional work, as well as her brother John, her usual companion at this time.

Ann wished to earn some money, that she might purchase a Sunday bonnet and other articles of costume, to replace those of which she was now deprived. Strong in her resolution, strong in her love, she laboured; and no one who has not entered fully into the spirit of the farming, and labouring classes of England, can realize the shame and disgrace which they attach to the absence of suitable dress on Sunday. It must be different, it must be superior, otherwise a want of respect both to the day, to themselves, and to others is implied; if they cannot dress properly, they had rather stay in. Therefore Mrs. Howard knew very well that locking up her daughter's "things" was virtually tanta-

mount to locking up Ann herself,—quite as effectual a mode of keeping her at home, and a much easier one.

From three till half-past six was her working time; at the latter hour she must go in-doors to light the fire and get the breakfast, finding a spare minute to fetch water for that meal from a spring two fields off; and the breakfast was no trifling affair, for Farmer Howard must have bacon fried, and bread must be crumbled in the children's messes of milk; the children must be fetched down, washed, and dressed by their eldest sister, who, at the conclusion of the morning meal, has various duties depending on the day. If it is "washing day," she must fill the copper, light the fire, and "soak" the clothes ready for washing; and so on. Then, as soon as possible, to the field again, to work with equal diligence as before, though of course not with equal enthusiasm.

One morning whilst yet the dewdrops glistened like myriads of diamonds upon corn-ear and grass-blade, and ere the gorgeous scarlet poppies

had unfolded their leaves to the rising sun's beams, whilst early cocks were crowing, and drowsy watch-dogs shaking their chains, a waggon piled high with wooden, or, as they are called, "Windsor" chairs, came rolling heavily along the road at the further end of the field where Ann, like a second Ruth, stood among the reapers. The proprietor of the waggon and the chairs, a large manufacturer, and a great man in his way, stopped his sturdy horses to give them a rest after a rather steep hill, and, stepping through a gap in the hedge into the field, stood looking at the reapers. He saw Ann, and struck with her uncommon beauty, seemed unable to withdraw his eyes from the fair vision.

"You work hard, to be up so early, young woman," he observed. "You reap well, too. You'd soon make an acre of corn look foolish!"

"Please, sir, I'm not particular to corn," said Ann, pleased with his encomium; then added, in her Buckinghamshire dialect, "I'd go and fetch down an acre of banes before any on 'em was up."

"Who are you reaping for?" asked the chairmaker.

"Father."

"Oh, your father. It is a great pity such a nice young girl as you should be out at field-work."

Ann intimated that it was optional on her part. The chairmaker saw by her speech and manners that she was as modest as beautiful. He had a susceptible heart; he lingered, talking and looking. To make further way in her good graces, he offered to "stand" beer for all the reapers.

"Could any one go and fetch it?"

Old Joe Monk, a veteran reaper, was deputed. He soon hobbled back with a liberal supply. All drew round to partake, handing forth their bone drinking-horns.

"Here's good luck to you, sir," said Joe Monk: "and may you have a werry pretty wife, and lots of children, I hope!"

"Thank you, my good man. For the first article I wouldn't wish to look further than your

harvest-field. If that young woman "—pointing to Ann—"will have me, I declare, before you all, I'll marry her then and there,—that is, as soon as can be. I'll take her to Windsor, and make her my wife. You knows me, many of you, don't ye? I've come about here some time now" (several declared loudly that they did). The chairmaker, a most respectable-looking man, in the prime of life, with an unmistakably well-to-do air about him, went on: "What say you, my dear? Will you have me?"

"Thank you, sir, kindly, all the same; but I must say No," answered the simple-hearted Ann, thinking of Isaac. And she returned to her work, as did the other reapers, except Joe Monk, whom the chairmaker (having discovered that he had worked on the farm for a great many years), drew aside for a long talk, during which the Windsor man learned all particulars of Ann and her family. After this he returned to the charge.

"I'm in earnest, I assure you, my girl," he

said. "I'll go before your father and mother; anybody may investigate my character. You can come along with me, just as you are; I'll buy your clothes; you shall have a good home and a true husband; and you need not work at all, but have a servant to wait on you."

"Well, I'm blowed if the gen'leman don't speak up handsome," said Monk, filling himself another horn of ale.

"I'm very much obliged to him;—indeed, sir," said Ann, curtseying, "it's an honour as I don't anyways deserve."

"But you will accept my offer?" said the maker of chairs, eagerly, and taking her hand.

"No, sir; no, thank you; not on no account whatever!" said Ann, endeavouring to give more force to her refusal by a reduplication of negatives, blissfully ignorant of the grammatical law which constitutes two, an affirmative. "Thank you, kindly, sir; thank you for me, all the same! I must bid you a very good day, now, sir, for I've got all this piece of ripping to finish."

And with grateful, though shy looks, and repeated curtseys, Ann resumed her labours. The chairmaker, observing, "Well, I've made you a fair offer, young woman, and I ain't a-going to wish you no ill because you don't accept it; on the contrairy, I wish you well—Good bye, and God bless you!"—quitted the field; and the cracking of his massive whip caused the great horses to prick their ears and put the ponderous waggon in motion, disappearing, with their owner, down the road.

"Well, that's no end of a chap, and I wishes there was more such," said old Monk; "no gammon about him, not a bit; spoke handsome, and behaved handsome, too,—blowed if he didn't! Wonder if he'll come again?"

The chairmaker—doubtless, he had a name, but he has been handed down to posterity as "The Chairmaker"—*did* come again, twice. Monk had gossiped about him to Mrs. Howard, who being assured by collateral evidence of the wealth and integrity of the man of Windsor, thought it "a good chance for Ann." But Ann,

though (as she afterwards admitted, speaking confidentially) "he was quite a man as she could have taken to," gave him always the same answer. An engagement in her class of life is not so solemn and stringent as in the upper classes. It is supposed to be conditional, almost up to the foot of the altar; that it may be set aside, cancelled by either party without disgrace, if one gets tired of the other, or a more eligible proposal offers. If Isaac's misfortune had not called forth all Ann's tenderness and sense of honour, making her feel "that she could never forsake him," she might have listened to the voice of the chairmaker, for the prospect of marrying Askew seemed remote and beset with difficulties, and she was now far from comfortable at home; but, as it was, she remained firm, and the chairmaker's courtship was but a romantic episode.

Before the harvest was in, Ann had contrived to buy a bonnet, the fac-simile of that so jealously guarded by maternal lock and key; and bonnets in those days were not to be bought

cheap and flashy as now; a good straw bonnet would cost nine or ten shillings. She put on the neat, plain white ribbon, and conveyed her treasure to the Kiln to be taken care of. Her shoes (Sunday ones), the articles next in importance which she had purchased, she dug a hole for, and deposited them therein, well wrapped in hay, with a piece of turf on the top.

To such stratagems was the poor girl driven by the severity of her mother. The double anger she incurred because she persisted in refusing good offers, and continued to "keep company" with Askew, was sometimes almost unbearable; for with all her attempts at secresy her continued encouragement of the young brick-maker was not unknown. There is something in true and ardent love that is sure to betray itself, especially to the lynx eyes that disapprove of it. Almost daily "rows" took place between the girl and her mother; and often after the war of words had raged to a fearful climax of violence, Mrs. Howard would end by boxing her daughter's ears spitefully, or applying a stick to

her shoulders, which the then fashion of low-necked "frocks" for young girls, left conveniently exposed. As in the fable of the sun and wind, the furious blast did but cause the traveller to wrap his cloak more closely around him, so this fierce opposition did but make Ann fold Isaac's image more tightly to her heart. Had the sunshine of love and confidence warmed her, doubtless one so pliable and affectionate by nature would have argued,—"I cannot be so cruel as to hurt my mother's feelings, when she is so good and kind to me, and trusts me so fully." It is possible her misplaced attachment might have died a natural death; but as it was,—ill-used, treated with suspicion,—what wonder that she was rebellious, and hardened her heart against her parent? She sometimes threatened that she would go to service in London or elsewhere; anything seemed better than this constant persecution.

Howard would remonstrate, with—"Don't be a fool, girl! Can't you take to the farmer, Nancy?" but he was never harsh or cruel.

Once or twice since Isaac's accident, he remonstrated seriously with her: she was touched, and sorry to grieve him; but her heart revolted at the worldliness of her father's argument against marrying "a man with one hand."

"I wonder if father would have liked mother to cut *him* if *he* had lost his hand?" Ann said to herself. "Not he. He says Isaac's wild; but suppose he is—has not every one got their faults?"

Howard did not mean to be worldly, only prudent, where his favourite daughter was concerned. Similarly tried, he might have acted as unselfishly, as foolishly as Ann. But even the best of us set up for others a different standard from our own. We are too apt to expect those we are called upon to advise, to be more rational, more cautious, more far-seeing than we are or have been: we will not put ourselves in their place, and look at the subject from their point of view, making allowance for youth, temperament, circumstances, or the mists of passion.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ELOPEMENT.

"And I must leave my home at last—
* * * *
I look into my father's eyes,
I hear my mother's parting sighs;
Ah, fool, to pine for other ties!

Who now shall cheer my lonely sire,
When care and toil his heart shall tire?
My chair is empty by the fire."

GILBERT GRIFFIN.

IT was a cold, clear evening, in very early spring, when the lengthened hours of daylight are almost the only visible sign that stagnant winter is about to be chased from the earth—the spell dissolved by which he held all things entranced, ironbound, whilst Nature still hesitates about putting forth her young tender shoots, and keeps them back from the piercing winds; and the bright though cold spring light (in which, as

science tells us, there is such a preponderance of blue rays)—the cold, all-penetrating, uncompromising light makes the dreariness and barrenness of field and woodland, tree and hedgerow, more apparent than in the shorter, darker days when deepest winter reigns with undisputed sway.

On such an evening as this a girl might be seen to steal from Crow's Nest Farm, her fair cheek so flushed that not even that trying spring light can pale it—pulses so throbbing that not even that bleak, cutting air can chill them. She looks up and down the road like a wild, frightened bird; no one is in sight; she crosses to a field opposite to the farm-gate, popularly known as the Furze, or "Fuz-field," and amongst the furze that grows there—its deep green forming an agreeable relief to the eye in the waste of sober greys and gloomy browns—she deposits a box and sundry parcels, containing all her clothes and worldly goods. It is Ann Howard. Her father and mother have gone to Aylesford, a town some miles off, in the "shay-cart;" and this is

the time fixed for her elopement. The elder boys are not yet come home, and Ann had sent out her sister Sally, the only girl old enough to observe unusual proceedings, to take the baby and the two younger children into "Ten-acres" field to see the boys at work—an expedition they always enjoyed, and which would keep them out of the way until the packing and removal of Ann's things was effected. Concealed, she had watched their safe return; and her thoughts turned painfully on her approaching flight from her home—a happy home, before her love for a stranger came as a cloud over it. Her mother, with all her late harshness, had been a good mother to her; this very harshness is meant for her good; she seemed to see that mother's care-worn anxious face—to see her father's kind blue eyes turn upon her with pride and affection—to hear his clear, cheerful voice call her "his own gal"—"his bonny Nan." Then her brothers and sisters—the thoughtful, delicate John, with his beautiful face, who had always

been her companion, till they seemed in their love to have but one heart and soul between them; rough, blunt Will, with his queer ways, who loved her too, after his own fashion; strong, bouncing Sally, who, though a little hot at times, would do anything for "dear Nan." Each of the younger children, too, was endeared to her for some special reason; the peevish, sickly Charlotte, whom she had nursed through many a weary illness,—whose first smile, whenever she got a little better, was always bestowed on "Nan;" the sweet little baby, who was as good with her as with its mother; and pretty, curly-haired Emma, the youngest but one, whom she had held in her arms when but a quarter of an hour old, and had taught, but a few months since, to run alone.

She went to the kitchen window—it was so high she could only just bring her face on a level with the lower panes—to look at the young ones. They had hunted for her, as she gathered by their simple words, all over the

house; and, perceiving her common bonnet and tippet gone from their accustomed nail behind the door, were overwhelmed with despair.

The kitchen fire was laid, but not lighted—with a due regard to economy, and the safety of small children; a match was to be applied immediately on the parental cart being heard, to boil the kettle for tea. On the long, flat ledge of polished red tiles,—which, raised about the height of two bricks above the level of the white stone floor, formed the hearth on which the dog-irons of that vast fireplace were supported,—the little things were seated in a row, Sally and the baby in the centre, their elder sister's absence evidently the subject of which their young hearts were full; one girl kept repeating, or rather singing, in a low monotonous chant, that rose and fell like the wailing of the wind, "Our Nanny's gone to London, to sarvice, I wish she would come home!"—being joined in the last phrase in a melancholy howl in various keys by the others, as in a sort of chorus.

This was too much for Ann; her heart failed her; clasping her hands, she inwardly ex-

claimed—"Oh, oh! if it were not for those things out in the Fuz-field I would never go away. If I could get them back now without mother seeing—but I could not—"

And the dog Gyp, who always acted the part of avant-courier to his master and mistress, preceding them by some minutes, now heralded the near approach of the shay-cart, by rushing excitedly up, and scratching impatiently with his paws at the house-door. Still Ann lingered, and it was not until the sound of wheels rolling rapidly along the hard dusty road, recalled her to the necessity for action,—recalled her to the sense that she had gone too far to retreat,—that, with tears in her eyes and sadness at her heart, she hid behind some of the outbuildings, and waited until she could, unseen, repair to the place where she had appointed to meet Askew. Concealed at a little distance, he had waited for her long; and now, with grateful and encouraging words, he shouldered her luggage, and pale, dejected, silent, she walked by his side, in the now closing daylight.

CHAPTER VII.

THE KING OF TERRORS.

"Dreading a justly incensed father's frown."—*MS.*

"The wan moon climbs the heavenly heights,
And underneath her sickly ray,
Myriads of squalid spectres play;
And the dying mortal's groan,
Startles the night on her dusky throne."

KIRKE WHITE.

THE next day Ann's parents went down to the Kiln, and vehemently reproached the elder Askew and his wife for aiding and abetting Ann in her disobedience. They did not ask to see their daughter—they disowned her from that time, they said. And they kept their word; taking no notice of her, and forbidding her brothers and sisters to speak to, or even look at her.

At the Kiln she was made much of at first,

and treated as a daughter and sister; but soon, imposing on her good-nature, all the hard work of the family was laid upon her; and in order to contribute to her own support—which she found she was expected to do—she worked early and late at lace-making, which art, like many girls in that part of the country, she was well versed in. As she used to say, when describing her residence at the Kiln in after-years, "it was at first all honey, but before long all verjuice." Mrs. Askew was addicted to drinking; she and her husband had scarcely been on speaking terms for the last fifteen years, so great was his disgust at her, and they occupied, as much as possible, different parts of the house. She constantly kept a bottle of rum under her pillow, and spent in drink money that might have greatly conduced to the comfort of the family. She was in ill-health from the effects of her excesses, and often very violent in temper, sparing no one; in her sober moments she was very fond of Ann Howard—who, indeed, enjoyed a painful pre-eminence, as the old lady

would suffer no one else to do anything for her —while Mrs. Askew declared she would give all she possessed to see her pet son "Ikey," as he was generally called at home, married to that girl before she died. Isaac was the youngest of the family, and spoiled from his cradle—doubly so now, since his accident; it was "poor Ikey must have this," and "dear Ikey cannot be expected to put up with that," for ever. This treatment, of course, fostered his selfishness, and strengthened all that was evil in his character. His sister Sarah, the youngest of the two remaining at home—the elder son and daughters had gone out in the world to seek these living—was his favourite; however unjust or wrong he was, she would always take his part, even against Ann, whose meek temper rendered her very unfit to contend against these strong, fiery, ungoverned natures. The other sister, Harriett, was a whining, poor-spirited creature, full of fine-lady airs, who made Ann drudge like a slave in waiting upon and working for her. The father Askew was

Ann's best friend in this ill-ordered and discordant family. He had always a kind word for her, and was ready to assist Isaac in getting a house of his own, and setting up for himself, preparatory to marrying; but Isaac was idle and dilatory, and now that he could see Ann every day and all day long, seemed in no hurry to make her his wife. They did very well as they were, and he could keep his pound a week, and spend it as he liked on himself, not in helping to keep house, which he said he did not seem to care about at present. Several times his father urged upon Isaac that he was keeping Ann in an uncomfortable and unsatisfactory position, and that, if he meant to marry her at all, he had better marry her at once; twice or thrice he sent Isaac out provided with money to buy a wedding-ring, and each time the young scamp came home without the golden circlet that was to make Ann a bride, having spent the money in getting drunk. Still Ann loved him, and Isaac knew it, and the consciousness and the security that she would be

his at any time he chose, made him careless and half-indifferent.

It was discovered that Ann was an excellent hand at nursing; no one managed Mrs. Askew so well in her illnesses, and it became the custom to send the young girl to nurse any members of the family (several were settled in the neighbourhood) who happened to fall sick. Nor were Ann's relatives above availing themselves of her skill in this line, at least on one occasion, even whilst her parents continued to ignore her.

Mrs. Howard's father, a man named Pearson, lived at a place called the Dell, about a mile and a half from Crow's Nest. Ann had many a time run down the hill, and across Littlewood Common, from her own home to the Dell, which, as its name implied, lay at its foot. Mr. Pearson, whose wife had been dead many years, kept a housekeeper, one Hannah Skinner, a gaunt woman of forbidding aspect, but honest and faithful, and high in her master's regard and esteem. She was about fifty, and it chanced

that the summer following Ann's flight to the Kiln, Mrs. Skinner sickened with a contagious fever, which frightened every one of Pearson's relatives and others in the neighbourhood out of their wits, and caused them, with due reference to the first law of nature—self-preservation—to keep away, leaving the unfortunate woman alone in her illness and suffering, to shift for herself or to die like a dog, as the case might be. It is to be presumed that these people, living in a land that calls itself Christian, had heard the Divine precept, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you;" but whether they considered themselves in some remarkable way exempt from obeying Christ's command, or whether they hoped that, if ever their turn came to have a dangerous sickness, some one might be found more humane than themselves—that the rule "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again," might in their cases be reversed,—or whether, as is perhaps more probable, they thought nothing whatever about our Lord and his precepts,—cannot be determined,

but that the dog's fate would have been Hannah Skinner's, is certain, had not Mr. Pearson, hurrying about the country vainly seeking for assistance, accidentally stumbled upon Ann, who, hearing that the poor housekeeper was ill and neglected, willingly undertook the service.

She found Hannah dreadfully ill, delirious at times, and requiring incessant watching. For six weeks the young nurse waited on her, for long dreary nights never leaving her side, discharging the arduous duties of her post as well, or better, than many twice her years. Alone in that large, rambling, ancient house, with its narrow, old-fashioned passages, along which the footsteps echoed with a hollow eerie sound; its large empty rooms, into which the light came dimly through high latticed windows; the heavy doors, which creaked and groaned on their hinges with every breath of wind; the quaint, oaken furniture, which took strange shapes when twilight mingled the long shadows on the floor, seeming like huge giants or grotesque misshapen imps, lurking and watching

till they could perpetrate some evil design;—all combined to add gloom and awe to this dismal time. Yet she had little leisure for weird imaginings. Mrs. Skinner, during her intervals of consciousness, fully appreciated the devotion and tenderness of her young nurse. "I shall die, my dear," she would say; "but when I am dead, mind you are to have all my clothes, —I 've got some good uns,—and take my watch, and there's five pounds in that right-hand drawer there,—take the key and get it out now, and keep it."

Ann hoped she would recover; so did Mr. Pearson, whose full intention it was to marry the housekeeper, if she survived. He came occasionally to the sick room, and said a kind word or two to patient and nurse, but he was little in the house, and frequently away until a late hour at night. The house was so dreary, no wonder he could not bear it; he would just snatch a morsel of the food Ann managed to prepare for him, and then was off again. Besides, it was a busy time of the year, his

occupation being that of heath-broom maker; he had a large yard filled with materials, and employed many workmen; while the purchase of suitable wood and other requisites, as well as treating with customers for his goods—waggon-loads of which were constantly being sent off—necessitated long and frequent journeys to various parts of the country.

One evening, Hannah—having been unusually restless and wandering during the day—suddenly asked Ann if "Master was in the way?"

"No," Ann answered; "he was gone in the chaise to Beechgrove to buy wood, and could not, she feared, be back till late."

"Oh! how I wish he was here!" cried the sick woman, with sudden energy. "I have been a-praying for him to come for such a long time."

"Do you feel worse, Mrs. Skinner?" asked Ann.

"No, I don't know as I do," answered the housekeeper, in a hollow voice, looking round

with wistful, lack-lustre eyes. "But I want to see him."

She lay for an hour or so, apparently in a sinking, exhausted state; but Ann thought she had seen her as bad, or nearly as bad before, and set a cup of beef-tea ready to give her when she roused again.

"Lift me up," Mrs. Skinner said presently. Ann bent over her, and the sick woman clasped her hands round her nurse's neck to raise herself. In that position the death-spasm seized her; she fell back a corpse, dragging Ann down also. With a thrill of horror Ann extricated herself from this fearful grasp; and yielding to her first impulse, rushed from the room. Alone in that house at that hour with a corpse, stronger nerves than the girl's might have quailed. That indefinable, unconquerable sense of dread, far more oppressive, more appalling, than visible, tangible danger; that fear of the unknown, the ghostly, the supernatural; that "shuddering at death by reason of the dead"—who has not at

some period or other of life known it? With strange inconsistency, Ann's dominant idea as she hastened along the dark passages was, that the dead woman would follow, and seize hold of her. Shaking like an aspen leaf with terror, she reached her room, and in her extremity of distress sought the protection of the "God of the spirits of all flesh," who has declared that unto Him all mortals shall come. And that Divine Being, to whom darkness and light are both alike, and the night as clear as the day, looked down upon the forlorn girl—as kneeling by her bed, while the faint gleam of her small candle scarcely shed its beams over more than a section of the chamber, she alternately prayed in her own simple words that "nothing might hurt her," and read aloud from her little prayer-book various petitions either suitable or unsuitable to her case—and her agony of fear gradually subsided. And after a time she rose up, strengthened and comforted, and went down-stairs. Possessing herself of some rushlights, she sought the companionship of light, by setting them up in a

row along the passage, to guard her, like flame-sentinels, her practical habit of mind leading her to obviate any risk of setting the old "Dell" on fire, by placing each watchman in a milk-pan! She now felt sufficiently courageous to go back and see if Mrs. Skinner were really dead, and having satisfied herself of the fact, came out of the room again to find—mysterious and startling circumstance — every rushlight extinguished! Almost shrieking, Ann relighted them, and then, in a state of mind so fearful that she never forgot it, or lost the impression in its vividness through all her subsequent trials, she crouched down, and like the Apostle and his trembling companions of old, "wished for the day."

Perhaps still more anxiously did she wish for the old man's return. Time passed, his pinions apparently lead-laden, when canine paws were heard at the door. In those remote country places where human dwellings were but thinly scattered, almost every house had its watch-dog, —an important personage too, who guarded the premises from thieves at night, and accompanied

his master's wanderings by day, making it a point of conscience always to get home first.

Joyfully Ann hastened to let Spanker in, and caressed his great brown shaggy head, and even hugged him in her arms with delight at his company. Her nervousness subsided, the old man must be near, and the dog was a friend whose presence might chase spectres. But Spanker, with that wonderful instinct of his race, appeared conscious that all was not as usual, for instead of answering Ann's welcome by a short glad bark, as was his wont, he whined, and cried, like a human thing, keeping close to the girl's side.

Mr. Pearson's chaise now rattled up to the door.

"Oh, grandfather, poor Hannah's gone!" burst from Ann's lips, as though it were a relief that some one should share the weighty secret.

"No, Ann!" cried the old man, turning pale; —"not dead!"

"Yes, quite dead!"

"Oh, dear! and you all alone! poor girl!"

The worst part of her trial was over now; she stayed until after the funeral, and the dead woman's effects were given to her by her grandfather, who knew the housekeeper's wishes on the subject. They comprised handsome shawls, dresses, and enough linen, of first-rate quality too, for a marriage outfit, though a superstitious feeling prevented Ann from turning it to that use. Mr. Pearson was so pleased with Ann's conduct, that he presented her with fifteen pounds; and various members of Mrs. Skinner's family gave her money in token of their approbation, so that Ann was, comparatively speaking, a rich woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOING TO RUIN.

"I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse."
2 *Henry IV.*

ANN remained two months in all at the Dell, and during the last week, when (the funeral over) she and her grandfather were together in quiet, the old man sounded her as to whether she would not now give up Isaac Askew, and be willing to go home again. Ann said she should be glad to go back, but, on Mr. Pearson's making overtures to that effect at Crow's Nest, Mrs. Howard flatly refused to have anything more to do with her daughter. "Ann should not sleep on a bedstead of hers, much less on a bed," she said. She dared Ann so much as to look over the gate, and even expressed the awfully wicked wish that the girl might catch

the fever; it would serve her right for going to nurse that Hannah Skinner, who was nothing more than an interloper. Ann did not catch the fever, but she went back to the Kiln, where things were more uncomfortable than ever.

Mrs. Askew had always, as her husband said, "drunk like a fish;" and if it is true that the icthyic tribes imbibe liquid in great quantities, she more and more resembled one. All day, when not in bed, she sat by the fireside in her bonnet and shawl, quarrelling with every one who came near her, on the slightest provocation, or with no provocation at all. Her husband kept as much as possible out of her way. On one occasion she had attempted to stab him, through jealousy—most unfounded, for a steadier man never lived. Her daughters were the especial objects of her drunken anger. Sometimes in a paroxysm of wrath she would hurl a kettle of boiling water across the kitchen at them, or seize a red-hot poker for the same purpose, using the language of a mad woman. Soon after Ann's return to the Kiln, it pleased Heaven to

deliver the family from the curse of the old lady's presence; for after a few weeks' illness, during which Ann dutifully nursed her, she died.

Her daughters ordered the most expensive and stylish mourning, and began to enjoy themselves. Two highly respectable young men, sons of better-class farmers, whom they had met when out visiting, paid attention to the Misses Askew, which seemed likely to result in matrimony. These admirers were encouraged to come frequently to the Kiln, and extravagant feasts were prepared for them during the absence of the head of the family, who, on his return, marvelled and murmured at the thinning of the ranks of chickens, ducks, and geese; which the strapping Sarah, whose own fair hands had seized and strangled the doomed birds, would attribute to "that horrid fox." Not content with substantial comforts, these young ladies spent more on show and in going about, than their mother had in drink. They ran up bills in the most reckless manner; for the brickmaker's credit being good,

tradesmen would trust them unhesitatingly. What they had not, and could not get, they would pretend to have; to appear well in the eyes of the young men. For instance, Sarah would say, as she sat in her fine clothes, all traces of useful occupation laid aside, "Oh dear! how tiresome! father has gone out, and taken the key of the cellar with him, we cannot get any wine!" Or Harriett would lisp out, "How provoking! the key of the plate and of the best china closet is mislaid; we must use the common things!" Ann, at first, was much astonished, knowing that iron spoons and forks were the only articles of that sort she had ever seen, and that the closet indicated as the "best china one," contained nothing but papers and rubbish; but by degrees she became used to these fictions, and supposed them to be part of the formula of politeness. Isaac did his full share in squandering the money; it was part of his business to ride out to the neighbouring towns, sometimes to places at a considerable distance, to take orders for bricks. From these excursions he seldom, if

ever, returned sober. He had a perfect mania for "treating" other people to drink: whoever he met was welcome to assist him in spending his money, or his father's, which he viewed in the light of his own. At home, when left to superintend the workmen during his father's absence, he would broach a barrel of beer, which he had caused to be transported from the house to the yard in a wheelbarrow, covered with a sack to screen it from vulgar gaze; and Mr. Askew would return to find all the men on his premises stupidly drunk, some asleep in one corner, some in another, his son the worst of all, while the empty barrel lying on its miniature dray, told its own tale.

An income larger than the brickmaker's could not have stood such drains; money ran short, and bills poured in (including many for liquor, left unpaid by the late Mrs. Askew): the young farmer suitors gradually withdrew their allegiance. In the general anarchy or misrule Ann was neglected; sometimes there was food provided, sometimes none. All Ann's little stock of

money was borrowed, and melted away like the rest. The girls got possession of nearly all their future sister-in-law's clothes, coaxing her to lend them first one thing, then another, which were never returned; so that her stock, at first ample, dwindled gradually down. By laborious exertions in lace-making, she several times put by a little store,—to furnish a house, as she hoped, for herself and Isaac, for she was daily more wearied with this confusion. Vain hope! The money was constantly asked for and spent, without seeming to do any one any real good; it was like pouring water into sand.

His wife had been dead but a few months before Mr. Askew brought home a second, which so incensed his daughters, that Harriett went off to Aylesford to learn the boot-binding business, then considered a very "genteel trade," returning home only to sleep; and Sarah, who was most violent and abusive in her language to her step-mother, treating her with all possible disrespect, soon went to service in London.

The second Mrs. Askew was not an unkind

woman, and she had about fourteen shillings a-week of her own, which helped in housekeeping. Still it was altogether a wretched home for Ann; and Mr. Askew, pitying her, urged his son to move into a cottage and marry her. At length Isaac consented to do the latter. He was too lazy to look out for a separate place of abode; they could live on, all under one roof, at present, he said. For the last three months he and the guileless young creature whose affections he had won, had lived on terms of closest intimacy. Ann, after long withstanding his temptation, had fallen, and there was danger that, in the touching words of the exquisite Scottish ballad, she would be "a mither, and nae wife." Sorrowful and ashamed, Ann felt that she must soon be his, legally, or her heart would break, and Isaac dared no longer be dilatory.

So the banns were put up, and the 14th of November fixed for the wedding-day.

CHAPTER IX.

ANN'S WEDDING DAY.

"Ah love! ah love! be kind to me;
For by this breaking heart you see
How dearly I have purchased thee!"

Gilbert Griffin.

COLD, dreary, and dark dawned the 14th of November; drizzling rain was falling, as the wedding-party, consisting of the bride and bridegroom, Harriett Askew, and the husband of a married sister of Isaac's, named Shervill, got into the chaise-cart which was to convey them to a village some twenty miles off, in the county of Middlesex, where the marriage ceremony was to be performed, according to the etiquette of country people, who cannot bear to be married at their own church, and consider the style and solemnity of a wedding increased in pro-

portion to the distance they go to get joined in the bonds of holy matrimony. Ann looked remarkably lovely, her golden hair falling round her like a cloud—Isaac always declared that it was the extreme beauty of her hair which especially won him—her eyes, deepened in expression, since she first stood before us, by trial, and suffering, and knowledge, which as yet had not marred the exquisite bloom of her rounded cheek, or tarnished the lustre of her dazzling complexion. There was a pensiveness about the sweet lines of the mouth, and the delicate rosy lips, not unbecoming a young bride; but Ann felt sad at heart, and strange, vague presentiments, like foreshadowings of evil, called forth sighs instead of smiles. She wore a "spencer" of rich green silk, which suited her colouring to perfection, trimmed (as she used to describe it to her daughters in after years) with a profusion of acorn-shaped buttons about the breast and sleeves; a white skirt of fine cambric, made with small tucks up to the waist; a white straw bonnet and ribbons; worked white stockings,

and shoes with sandals, completed her costume. Not less handsome appeared the bridegroom, in his suit of "bottle-green;" waistcoat the colour of ripe corn, "high-lows," neat neckhandkerchief, watch, and stylish breastpin; the clustered curls of his glossy black hair carefully arranged; his bright eyes brighter with excitement, at the thought of the "jolly day" he was going to spend. These two, as the most important personages, took their places in front, while the bridesmaid and groomsman sat (as the fashion then was) on chairs in the back part of the vehicle.

An inn, called "The Crooked Billet," formed a half-way house, and here the travellers stopped for refreshment. It was but seven o'clock, and no one was up at the public house except a maid-servant. Isaac was extremely eager to go in, that he might get, as he said, some hot "purl" for the party, who, stiff and chilly, remained in the chaise outside. But the young man stayed so long that his sister became angry, and Ann, uneasy at his lengthy absence, went to ascertain its cause. Noiselessly, not wishing to

disturb any one, she passed down the long empty passage, timidly opening and looking in at the doors which led out of it, until, coming to the last apartment, which was the kitchen, she saw her bridegroom elect. He was before the fire, on which a saucepan of beer was heating, his arm round the neck of the barmaid, whom he kissed and pressed to his heart—that fickle, unfaithful heart!– repeatedly!

Struck as if a dagger had entered her breast, Ann made no sign—her quiet entrance had not disturbed the treacherous pair—but returned on tiptoe as she had come, and, reascending the cart, burst into a flood of passionate, irrepressible tears. Soon the false Isaac came out, smilingly proferring the spiced beer; but Ann would have none of it, and Harriett, who had drawn from her sister-in-law the cause of her unhappiness, refused also, with an air of sullen disdain. Shervill launched forth into bitter invectives against the scapegrace, whose temper was roused, and a violent quarrel ensued.

Isaac presently tried to pass the matter off as

a joke. "Why, that's an old flame of mine," he said to the weeping, silent Ann; "'Little Sally,' of The Crooked Billet. We wasn't a-doing no harm. Don't be cross, old gal! Come, have a drop of purl."

But Ann declared she would not touch a drop of what *she*—the objectionable "Little Sally"—had "hotted;" and Shervill, with kind, rough sympathy, and the impression that "something to drink" is good for the heart-ache, went in and got brandy and water, saying the girls could not go on in the cold without something to warm them. Ann could not do more than just wet her lips, to pacify him.

But for the thought of her innocent unborn child, the poor, heart-stricken girl—little more than a child herself in years—would not have gone on, but have turned back, on foot or anyhow, then and there. As it was, she submitted to her fate, and the two men having become somewhat better friends, the party proceeded; but, owing to this delay, did not arrive at the church until the "parson"—as he was then without

disrespect termed—had been kept waiting more than an hour, and there was barely time left to get through the service before the midday chimes stopped matrimonial proceedings for that day; though all this, in Isaac's eyes, only added to his own consequence.

With trembling limbs and painful misgivings, which yet could not quench her affection, Ann vowed "to love, honour, and obey" her husband until "death them did part." Faint and bewildered, her faith in human nature shaken, her prayers to the Infinite, the Divine, the Unchangeable, burst forth as an inarticulate cry. Scarce conscious of the outward world, the inner world of her soul was penetrated by deepest devotion. "I sleep, but my heart waketh"—waketh to that profound consciousness of the instability of mortal love, the unsatisfactoriness of mortal life, on which true faith in the unseen, the hereafter, is founded. The poor rustic girl put not her thoughts in such words as these, would not have understood them had they been used to her; but none the less truly,

for want of power of expression, did her heart turn in that hour from man to God, from earth to heaven. The world poured in again—as in whose soul does it not?—but perhaps the impress of such moments, when out of helplessness is born strength, may remain, and form a portion of that wondrous Jacob's ladder which—can we doubt?—connects the lowliest mortal with the skies.

The ceremony over, the register signed, Isaac immediately "treated" the clerk to "something to drink" at the nearest public-house, of course imbibing liquor also himself. Then according to programme, the party adjourned to a town two or three miles farther on, where at an inn called "The Ram," dinner had been ordered. Here a large party of Isaac's boon companions —whom he had informed beforehand of his intended proceedings — were assembled. The young man's business brought him so often to this town, that he was known to a great number of people in it; and his habit of "treating" with drink had rendered him universally popular.

Isaac swore that he would have, as he expressed it, "a swimmer" that day; and certainly a person might almost have swum in the quantity of liquor "stood" by him on this occasion. Not only ale, but bottles of brandy, rum, and other spirits were broached, to suit the various tastes of those who crowded in to drink his health. This uproarious mob (for such it soon became) entirely spoilt any comfort or enjoyment poor Ann might have derived from the "beautiful dinner," which she admitted it was; or from a quiet talk with Isaac amongst their own small party, which might have soothed her wounded feelings, and renewed his tenderness.

He spent all the twenty pounds he had brought out with him; Ann, who thought of the future, grudging such a waste of money, though she dared not say anything.

By the time the chaise was ordered round, which was not until between five and six o'clock, Askew and Shervill were so drunk they could not keep their seats. Both soon sunk helplessly to the bottom of the vehicle, and Sister Harriett

was compelled to take the reins. After a weary, miserable drive, and many misadventures, Harriett, being nervous and flurried, and the night dark, overturned the whole party into a ditch, from which horse and chaise and staggering men were with difficulty extricated. Isaac was sufficiently sobered to swear and be very troublesome. He found fault with whatever arrangement was proposed. It was finally settled that Shervill, accompanied by Harriett, should take charge of horse and chaise, leaving the vehicle, in passing, at the place where it had been borrowed, and leading the animal home; whilst Isaac conducted Ann by a "short cut" to a house near the Kiln, belonging to a married sister, commonly known as "Sister Becky," where a room had been hired for a short time for the young couple. It might be a "short cut," but it was a most unpleasant one; over hedges and ditches, across ploughed fields wet with the rain which had never ceased, ankle-deep in mire and clay, the reckless Isaac dragged his hapless bride, who, on reaching home at last,

feeling ill, and worn, and heart-sick, her nice clothes splashed and draggled, was, as she expressed it, "just like a drownded rat."

She could have borne all, she thought, had Isaac on their reaching the house said a word of kindness or pity, but all the brutal parts of his nature were roused by drink, and the reaction that follows over-excitement; and as his wife sat drying her wet feet at the fire, instead of being moved to gentleness at her exhausted, suffering state, he struck a blow with his hand on her bent neck, with some savage joke about "killing young rabbits;" and, it being now four or five in the morning, took himself off to his neglected duties of foreman in the brickfield, whilst Ann, feeling as though her heart were now quite broken, and physical pain adding to her wretchedness—mad with the thought that he should have struck her—*he!*—crept upstairs, crying almost convulsively, to lie down by the side of one of her sister-in-law's little girls, but not to sleep. And so ended her wedding-day, the most miserable day she had yet passed in her life.

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO INFANTS.

"Babies are surely novelties no more,
When there have been eleven or twelve before.
Yet still my gentle father smiled on me."

JANE TAYLOR.

"Ah, hapless child, a sorry welcome's thine!"—MS.

CROW'S NEST still continued in a state of bitter hostility to the Kiln. Farmer Howard's heart yearned sometimes towards his erring, unhappy daughter, though Ann knew it not, for his wife's heart was steeled against all softer emotions where the girl was concerned, and she did her utmost to harden that of the Farmer, who had not moral strength to contradict her, and to brave her sharp temper and still sharper tongue. If any one answer to the description of Shakespeare's heroine, of whom it is said "She speaks

poignards, and every word stabs," it was Dame Howard. Implacable in anger, resentful, through life, of real or fancied injuries, this woman was an adept in the art of stinging with reproaches and insinuations, raking up from the depths of her tenacious memory reminiscences of hasty words, errors—however trivial—blunders, mistakes, long past and forgotten by others. The good deeds of her fellow creatures, more especially of such of them as were akin to her, the Dame wrote in sand, their misdoings she engraved on imperishable brass. Fearing, then, the scorpion-scourge of his wife's tongue, which became severely venomous on the subject of Ann, her marriage, and her new connexions, the milder-natured farmer rarely alluded to the subject, and kept aloof from his daughter. Children are less easily rated into silence, and frequent at first were the young ones' cries and lamentations for "Nancy." They could not understand why she was gone, still less why she would never come back, and nothing but dread of their mother, who "dared them" so much as to look

at their sister, awed them into submission. John, Sally, and Will would often talk of Nancy; but the young soon forget, or rather the recollection of a lost or absent one is obscured by persons and things present; and by the time of Ann's marriage, more than two years subsequent to her leaving Crow's Nest, her name was seldom heard in the little circle, of which she had once been the light and the joy.

Strange and sad that in some natures the milk of human kindness should thus turn to gall and wormwood,—that a fault in the object once dear and cherished, should drive out love for ever! Yet not love—it could have been but one form of selfishness; that miserable affection which lasts only so long as pride and personal feeling are gratified, and fades out to leave the heart an arid waste, where dwell the monsters Hate, Anger, Cruelty, Revenge—a "howling wilderness" of evil passions.

Six months after that dreary, dark November day, Mrs. Howard heard, without one thrill of motherly emotion, that the young wife of

Isaac Askew had, after great suffering, given birth to a son. "Was the little wretch dead?" No. "A pity; it would never do any good, with such parents!"

The Dame was busy making preparations for a similar event: another young bird was expected at the Crow's Nest. The preparations were on a suitably grand and solemn scale; the best doctor in that part of the country bespoken —Ann had been unattended, save by good old Joe Monk's wife; stores of tea, and sugar, and gin set aside for the occasion—Ann had not an ounce of tea, or a spoonful of either of the other articles; the Crow's Nest baby-clothes had been carefully overhauled, and new ones added— Ann had, at odd minutes, during the intervals of field-work, and a weary strain of eyes and bending of back over her lace-making pillow, constructed some infant's garments out of the dead Hannah Skinner's wardrobe—such portions of it, at least, as her sisters-in-law had not "borrowed," as they termed it; a kind husband was anxious

that Mrs. Howard should have every comfort and luxury to soften her pain and hasten her convalescence, whilst Isaac insisted on his wife's dressing and coming down-stairs three days after her confinement—she stumbling at every step from weakness—swearing that if she did not he would kick her down; and, finally, whilst Farmer Howard was prepared to welcome the young stranger with fatherly tenderness, although it was the eleventh baby whose face he had softly patted with his rough hand, and whose name he had duly and laboriously registered in cramped, quaint writing, in the fly-leaf of the family Bible, —Askew had received his eldest-born with curses and wicked words, with coarsely expressed doubts, cruelly insulting to his wife, about the child's parentage; "she had had so many lovers, it might as well belong to one of them as to him."

The new inhabitant of Crow's Nest made its appearance; and a few days after, the unhappy Ann, driven to desperation by sorrow and suffering, and thinking her mother's heart must be

touched and softened towards her, if but a spark of womanly tenderness lingered in that heart, left the little Jacob—as, to her great regret, her husband had insisted that her now six-weeks-old babe should be called, maintaining that the son of Isaac should be nothing but Jacob—left him in the charge of his by no means unkind step-grandmother; and pale, weak, trembling, summoned courage to revisit the home of her youth.

Howard was out; the children seemed grown strange, though they kissed her, and called her "Nanny:" they were evidently half in terror of a higher power. Ann timidly asked to see her mother, but this was peremptorily refused; the Dame sent down a cutting message by the sleek-looking monthly nurse, who stared at Ann's wasted frame and poor clothes, with ill-disguised, contemptuous pity. A large pig had just been killed and cut up, and tempting pieces lay about the kitchen; savory pork pies stood on the dresser; and the starving Ann devoured with her eyes her favourite "pig-meat," as it is

termed in her part of the country. She seemed likely to devour no portion of it in any other way, for not a morsel was offered to her. She hung about, longing: at last, as she was going to depart, one of the children, moved with compassion, said, "Here, Nance, take a piece of liver;" and the poor creature, thankful even for this, hastened home, not to cook the delicacy which her sinking frame craved for, but to save it for Isaac. There was not enough for two! Isaac, on his return, ate the fried pig-meat with relish, scarcely even thanking his wife for her attention.

Hunger and want pressed sore; added to this was humiliation that the doors of her home were shut against her. That night a thin wan figure, more resembling a ghost than a human being, as its light drapery waved in the wind, might be seen to enter one of the potato-fields belonging to Crow's Nest, and feebly, though resolutely, to dig up the nourishing roots, deposit them in a half-bushel basket, and stagger away

under its load. Ann had stolen her father's potatoes! "Oh! there can surely be no harm," she said, sobbing, to herself, "I must die else; and he would not wish it—oh! he would not wish it! May God and he forgive me!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAIR.

"I'm weary o' this warld, Willie,
And sick wi' all I see,—
I cannot live as I have lived,
Or be as I should be."—MOTHERWELL.

A TIME of fearful misery and hardship followed for poor Ann. Besides the struggle for bare subsistence, and the trial of having, as it were, no home of her own, but existing in the midst of a divided and poverty-stricken family,—for the Askews were burdened with debts, and the once flourishing brick-trade had dwindled, chiefly owing to Isaac's reckless mismanagement,—besides all this, her heart was wounded to the quick by her husband's unkindness. Had he been true and loving,—want, labour of the most fatiguing kind, even the deeply felt

estrangement of her parents,—might have been borne, might have seemed light; she could have toiled and struggled, and looked forward to better times. But what better times were likely to come, when her husband's misconduct became more and more flagrant? when that one redeeming feature—his love for her—appeared dying out? True, he had occasional fits of fondness, would admire her beauty, and be almost like the lover of old; and there was such an irresistible fascination about the man that Ann would be charmed, forgive all, believe his promises of amendment, and think that, with all his faults, there never was a man equal to Isaac. Unfortunately, with all that was sweet and loveable in her character, with her quickness and readiness, her undaunted perseverance and willingness to work, with her native delicacy and refinement of feeling, Ann's nature was not powerful enough to exercise permanent influence over a man like Isaac Askew. Ungoverned, self-indulgent as he was, there was a strength of mind, a superior intelligence, a capacity for receiving

and assimilating knowledge, about him, which nothing could quench. He had—no one, not even himself, knew how—picked up a great deal of miscellaneous information, which his vigorous intellect enabled him to apply; what he read, a tenacious memory retained, so that he learned more from one book than many less gifted men might from twenty. Isaac was indeed gifted with some of God's choicest endowments to his human creatures; beauty, mental power, and a splendid physical organization, which long defied and resisted the evil effects of drinking and dissipation.

After orgies which might have killed ninety-nine men in a hundred, or have at least reduced them to the brink of the grave, he would rise fit for work, with bodily and mental faculties scarcely, if at all, impaired, and go on for a few days beating all competitors in whatever he chose to undertake. Nothing (in his sober moments) seemed a trouble to him, and no one (in his sober moments) could be a more intelligent, agreeable companion, as all acknowledged

who knew him, whether his equals, superiors, or inferiors in position. How many, more or less gifted than Isaac, have sacrificed youth, health, fortune, respectability, have offered up the hearts, lives, happiness of those connected with them, at the shrine of the demon of drink! On that foul altar what costly treasures have been laid! the hapless infatuated worshippers—worse than those of ancient Moloch—destroy not the physical life alone, but also kill their immortality—all that is in them most divine—most God-like! That this craving for intoxication is a form of madness, seems scarcely to admit of doubt; how far to be controlled by its deeply-to-be-commiserated victims, it is for God, not man, to judge. Let those who have it not, thank their Creator, in a spirit far different from that of the Pharisee, —that they are not as some other men are; let those who have it, pray, "with strong crying and tears," for the presence of that Holy Spirit, who is not less powerful to save than in the days when demoniacal possessions were more common and less obscure. As yet Askew was in a

state of religious darkness, little better than that of the Ephesians of old, "who did not so much as know whether there was a Holy Ghost" —practically he was little better off than these early converts, although he had been duly baptized, confirmed, taught the Church Catechism, and could read the Bible "like a parson," as his family expressed it. But to his godless, earth-stained soul, these great truths were but "book-learning;" matters of course, of routine, things to be spoken parrot-like by the tongue, but never brought home to the heart; less to be valued than mere worldly lore, since the Gospel precepts were antagonistic to his style of life, and offered no instruction how to get gain or temporal advancement. Self-denial, love, patience, forbearance towards others, were by no means Isaac's favourite virtues; a rough, impulsive, often misdirected generosity, was the chief one that he could boast. Latterly, holy words, unless desecrated into oaths, were but seldom on his lips; and conscience—that first of our moral sentinels to slumber, the last wholly to desert

even the most depraved—began to lose its power; while the tempter whispered, "I am not worse than hundreds of others."

Any attempt of his wife to advise, or, as he termed it, to "bully" him, threw him into a dreadful rage: when she subsided into trembling submission and tears, allowing—foolish woman! —her deep love to appear through all; and he half-despised, half-pitied her weakness.

So time went on, and another child was born, nearly two years after the unwelcomed Jacob had first seen the light. Jacob was a red-haired, uninteresting baby, inheriting none of his parents' good looks; his sister Ann was prettier, with brown eyes and hair, but from her birth fretful and passionate. Ann did her duty to her children, as far as lay in her power; she was an affectionate mother, but as soon as she recovered her confinement she had no option but to go out again to field-work—lace-making alone would not support her—leaving her children with Isaac's sister, Becky, whom she paid to take charge of

them, as, of course, "grandmother could not be bothered" with the poor infants.

Shortly before little Ann was born, her mother's long-cherished desire of moving with Isaac into a home of their own, was accomplished. Whether it was that the hope had been deferred until her heart was too sick to enjoy its fulfilment, certain it is the fulfilment brought little additional comfort or happiness. The new abode was a nice little cottage, about three miles from the Kiln, which the elder Askew had taken for them, and of which he paid the rent. It was tolerably well-furnished, thanks to Ann's hard-earned savings, and the kindness of Isaac's father and his wife. Isaac continued as wild as ever, spending nearly all his wages, whilst his wife toiled hard to "make ends meet," and seldom was able to effect the meeting.

Ann now looked some years older than she really was—thin and faded—worn and faded at twenty-one!

After the birth of her second child, Isaac would never "take her so much as outside the door with him;" though he was often accompanied in various expeditions by his sister Sarah, who, having left her situation, was at home for a time. This was, of course, most galling to the wife's feelings, and Isaac, a most ready and plausible dissembler, would sometimes declare, untruly, that he was going alone "on particular business."

One day he impressed Ann with this belief, coaxing and flattering her with a show of affection, till she would, as he expressed it, "do anything for him." She had got him the best breakfast their means allowed—she often went without a meal that he might have double allowance, or some favourite delicacy; she had brushed and prepared his clothes, cleaned his boots, carefully tied his neckerchief, which the loss of his hand prevented his doing for himself—Ann was infinitely indulgent and tender to him on account of that lost hand, while rage and grief to be thus maimed in his early man-

hood often nearly maddened him. She had run up and down stairs, waited on him like a servant, and now bade him adieu cheerfully, with—"You are going alone, Isaac?"

"Quite alone, my gal," he answered, and tapped her cheek as a farewell.

Ann smiled; she had one or two pleasant subjects of reflection that day. One of these was a certain little store of money which she had scraped together, by soul and body-wearing exertions, during the past summer and autumn; which sum, amounting to five pounds seven shillings, she had hid away safe, sewn up in a scrap of her chintz-patterned gown, and deposited at the bottom of the box containing her best clothes, of which she always kept the key in her pocket. She rejoiced to think that Isaac was in utter ignorance of this hoard; if he knew of it he would spend it, and it was destined to add greatly to his and her comfort during the coming winter, by the purchase of much-needed household articles.

She mused on this, and visions of nice new

sheets, of kitchen bellows, of a strong deal table, of spoons, and knives, and tea-cups rose before her, as she stood watching her husband from the cottage door. He was to go on horseback; the horse—a fine, powerful, black animal of his father's, which he managed as well as if he had not lost his left arm—was fastened by its bridle to the little gate at the bottom of the cottage-garden. He was in high spirits and good-humour, and walked down the path, whistling gaily; he wore a white straw hat with blue ribbon, as for a gâla, and, as his admiring wife expressed it, "looked quite a dandy in his flash coat." He went "flying over the stile," a light wind waving the blue ribbon. But what is this? Something is fluttering besides the streamers on his hat. It is a piece of her chintz-gown, which, torn into scraps, he flings back at her as he passes the stile, and triumphantly rides off, leaving her this token that he carries with him her hidden store of money!

"How heartless—how cruel!" cried poor Ann, as she mechanically picked up the pieces of

print, and gazed at them through blinding tears —"to deceive me, mock me, rob me like this, when I have worked for you like a galley-slave! Oh, Isaac! Isaac!"

Her cup of bitterness was not yet full. Darting forward, by a sudden impulse, she was just in time to see him joined by the offensive Sister Sarah, who, dressed in the most showy and handsome style, was waiting for him at a little distance, mounted on her bay mare.

Off went the brother and sister at a fast pace, and the wife stood alone.

A sudden resolution seized Ann. She would follow them, and see what the "business" was. Not being quite so empty and ill-fed as usual, she thought she should have strength to walk to Aylesford, carrying the two children, whom she dared not leave alone in the house. So, locking up the cottage, she set off, an infant on each arm, and, for the first half of the way, felt no fatigue, her mind was so active. But three miles is a long drag with two heavy children, and by the time she reached the town she was

heated and weary. But she pressed on, nor paused till she reached the High Street.

It was Aylesford fair. The main street was thronged with booths, shows, vendors of gingerbread, with men, women, and children gazing about, eagerly buying trinkets, going in and out of public-houses, and evidently bent on pleasure. Faint and sinking, Ann—but that her heart was too full to eat—would have been glad of refreshment; she thought a drink of beer might moisten her parched lips, and put life into her, but she had not a penny to purchase anything. *He* had her all; and where was he? To find out this was the object for which she came, and till this object was fulfilled, she would not go back—no, not if she died in the search. She knew, by experience, that fairs, with their facilities for eating and drinking, their riotous mirth and wild company, had great attractions for Isaac. On she went, her beauty—for the flush of excitement had brought back her bloom—attracting the attention and comments of many a one there; on she went, resolutely holding

the two infants, unconscious of all remark, and, bent on her search, examining with earnest scrutiny every face she passed, looking at every group, peeping into every resort of revelry.

At length, in one of the dancing-rooms at a public-house, thrown open for the accommodation of those who chose to join in that amusement, she saw Isaac, dancing away with the utmost spirit; and his partner—she over whom he bends with such gallantry, such devotion—she into whose face he gazes with such an ardent look, is—could she believe her eyes?—no other than Little Sally, of the "Crooked Billet!"

A mist came over Ann's vision; her knees trembled; she almost dropped her children. This, then, was his "business!" But she would not make a scene; she must be firm; she steadied her nerves as best she might, and gazed again. Agitated as she was, every detail of that scene stamped itself on her mind. Vile, wicked, little Sally looked very pretty; she had languishing dark eyes, a small nose, a laughing rosebud of a mouth. Isaac was a connoisseur

in female beauty. Her hair hung dishevelled, but graceful, upon her white dress, all down the front of which Ann noted beer had been spilt. Now Isaac is "hugging her round the waist," and the couple whirl from the top to the bottom of the room. In the dizzy maze of dancers, Ann presently discerned Sister Sarah, her tall, full figure making the other women look small; her high colour deepened to peony-red by exercise; her black curls flying abroad; her white teeth gleaming, as she talks, and laughs, and flirts with her partner, a smart "chap," whom, as Ann rightly surmised, she had "picked up at the fair."

Ann stayed to see no more; but turning from the scene, made the best of her way home. Home! yes, it *was* a home for her, now! Probably he had rather Little Sally shared it, than her. And now—now, indeed—did she wish that she had never seen him to whom she was bound by vows, to be broken only by death. Ann wished herself dead, then prayed to God

to forgive her wicked wish. She undressed her wailing infants, and hushed them to sleep; and then, worn out as she was, sank on the floor, resting her head and arms on a chair by the bedside, to avait the false one's return.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BITTER CUP.

"The heart may break, yet brokenly live on."—BYRON.

BITTER were the reproaches with which the broken-hearted Ann assailed Isaac, on his return, which was not till the middle of the night. "Business," he muttered, as he reeled in.

"Business! yes, I know your business!" cried his wife, "to dance at a fair with that infamous Little Sally!"

"How do you know?" he asked, opening his eyes, for he was taken by surprise.

"I followed you; I saw it all."

"Then you are a mean spy!" he exclaimed, adding other abusive epithets, and giving them force with a volley of oaths.

A terrible scene followed, which shall not be detailed. Isaac was roused into violence of

action, as well as of language, and struck his miserable wife several blows. Ann felt heart-broken, spirit-broken; she wished she could die: but broken hearts kill only the weak in mind or body, and Ann was neither. The light and joy had fled from her life, and it seemed less a boon than a burden. But she had as yet only tasted the bitter cup which she was to drain to the dregs.

The next event that occurred was Isaac's discharge by his father, whom he had nearly ruined by his wastefulness, mismanagement, and dissolute conduct.

Isaac might do better, if left to himself; possibly he took advantage of his connexion with his father. House-rent and regular wages, however he behaved, were a sort of premium to idleness. He would not (at least so old Askew hoped) dare to waste another master's property, another master's time, as he did his father's. So, without unkindness or ill-feeling, Askew told his son the time was come when he must shift for himself. Lenient and considerate as ever,

he made his erring son a present of a couple of horses and a cart, that Isaac might earn his livelihood (if he would) by carrying stones, gravel, earth or turf, from one place to another, or, as it is called, "going to stone-cart." Isaac thought stone-carting would do as well as anything else; indeed that it would make a pleasant change, and he should like to be entirely "on his own hook," as he termed it.

For a couple of months he did pretty well, finding employment in the neighbourhood, until a "job" of gravel-carting being offered him further a-field, which would occupy a day or two, he set off, one fine morning, and three weeks passed without his returning. His hapless wife and babes, all this time, were literally starving; they were left with nothing in the house, "not even a crust of bread, or a stick of firing." Rent was overdue, and running on week after week—a most serious thing to poor people, whose landlords are seldom long forbearing. Now that Isaac was no longer foreman in the brickfield, of course he was liable for his own rent. Field-

work was not to be had at this wintry season of the year; and though for the first week she worked at lace-making, with the pillow on her lap, between the babies, and earned a trifle, yet her materials being then exhausted, she had no means of buying more. How the poor creature contrived to keep soul and body together, she herself scarcely knew. She was ashamed to go out, lest the neighbours should know her distress; yet the neighbours were very kind, as poor neighbours generally are. They would ask her to come in and take a cup of tea, and sometimes would bring in a little food. Every one pitied her, though little was said, for Ann's sensitive feelings shrunk from commiseration. So she sat and moped alone, in her desolate home; fifty times a day starting from her seat to see if her husband was coming, or at the fancied sound of his footstep. On Saturdays she was particularly excited. He could not work on Sundays; he would surely come home.

Almost the only time that she went beyond the little cluster of cottages forming the village,

she met her old love, James Dancer. He looked at her with respectful tenderness and pity. Ann at first shrunk from him, but the next moment "put," as she said to herself, "a good face upon it." She was not going to appear miserable, to him of all others; *she*, Isaac Askew's wife! So with a smile, and an excitement of manner which chased away the paleness from her face, she greeted the farmer, and showed him her children.

"That is a pretty little one; and you call it Ann?" he said; raising the child before him on his horse.

Ann the younger was fortunately in a good humour, and laughed and crowed at the farmer; who though he had not wasted away for love, though his cheek was still ruddy, and his frame strong and stout, loved Ann truly and with constancy, and felt a world of emotions, tender, bitter, regretful, rise in his breast as he fondled her infant: and he would doubtless have recalled and applied Lord Byron's beautiful lines, had

he ever had the advantage of reading that poet, especially where he says:—

> "And kissed, as if without design,
> The babe that ought to have been mine."

Little Ann had *not* "her mother's eyes," so soft, and clear, and loving; hers were bright, sparkling, wide-opened orbs, that seemed already to see through everything: she was darker, too, and had much of "her father in her face;" but what matter? she was Ann Howard's child, and the farmer gave a great sigh as he handed her back to her mother, carefully and timidly, as if she were made of blown glass, and a touch might break her. Red-haired Jacob had been set down to walk, and was clinging to his mother's knees; he set up a loud cry when Ann tried to make him show his face.

"We must go home," said Ann to the child, when she thought this colloquy had lasted long enough, "or father will get back before us, and be wanting his tea." (This was a polite fiction on Ann's part, for she had

not a grain of tea in the house, nor a drop of milk.)

"Well, good day, then," said Dancer, gathering up his bridle. "But I say, Nancy,—Ann,—Mrs. Askew, I mean,—if so be there is anything as I could do for you, nothing would be a greater pleasure. You understand. Don't mind asking me, now,—don't."

"Thank you, sir, kindly," said Ann, making him a curtsey. "There's nothing as you can do for me—thank you all the same."

"Here, my little man," said the farmer to Jacob; "take this from your mother's old friend, to buy a toy with." And he handed Jacob half-a-crown—he did not dare offer more.

Ann's smile, and "Thank the gentleman, my dear," would have repaid Mr. Dancer for many a half-crown.

Looking wistfully after her, the farmer, with a heavy heart, rode slowly towards his home—the handsome farmhouse standing amidst its well-cultivated acres, its sleek cattle and snug outbuildings, its stacks of corn and hay; while

within, the blazing hearth, the full larder, the substantial comforts, and air of plenty, contrasted painfully with Ann's bare cupboard and empty grate.

Some such comparison crossed her mind, as, after making sure that Dancer was out of sight, she hurried to the village shop, to buy bread with his bounty to her child. Before her mind's eye rose a vision of the luxurious home over which she might have been mistress, of the kind, considerate, steady man in whose heart she might have reigned. She reigned in his heart still—for that matter; she always would—but in another way. "I should have been better off in this world's goods, if I had married him," she said, half-aloud, as she watched the youthful Jacob almost choke himself in his eagerness to devour the food, and washed down her own morsel with a drop of cold water. But still in her heart she was true to Isaac.

The farmer's bread, as it might be called, lasted another day; and then again made itself felt that gnawing, wolf-like hunger, which seemed

to sap the very mainsprings of life. The children would not be pacified; both were still at the breast —food was often so scarce!—but the poor wasted breast had no nourishment for them now. She will go down to the Kiln and beg a morsel of bread.

Mrs. Askew received her kindly. "Isaac not returned?" No, and it made Ann rather short; but if grandmother would kindly lend her a shilling, or even sixpence, it should be repaid directly he came home.

"There is a shilling and a loaf of bread for you," said the good dame; "and never mind paying it back. You're too good a wife for such a man as Isaac, though I say it."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am," said Ann, faint as she was, "he don't mean no harm."

"Humph!—very odd ways of showing his meanings," said Mrs. Askew, taking the screaming Jacob in her arms. "Here, come along, my dear, I 'll give you a mug of milk. Nance, give the baby some, and take a drink yourself, if you like."

"Heaven bless you, mother!" faltered Ann, as she fed her girl, taking a "snack" herself meanwhile, whilst "grandmother" fed Jacob.

"I like this boy," said Mrs. Askew, "and so does my husband. I was by at his birth, pretty dear! I think we might take to him when he gets a little bigger. The children are in better case than you, Ann."

"They haven't had no anxiety on their minds, ma'am, God bless 'em! You see, I be so afraid Isaac is ill."

"Not he!" said the Dame. "He never had a day's illness in his life that I heard of."

"Well, if he's not," said Ann, speaking more cheerfully, for she was revived by the food, "he'll be sure to be home to-day."

"Not a doubt about it, *I* should say!" rejoined the Dame, with cutting irony. "He'll be at the cottage afore you gets there."

Ann brushed away a tear with the corner of her apron;—she was very weak—and rose to go.

"Here's a penny for Jacob," said Mrs.

Askew, who had not meant to give pain. "Mother can buy him some suckers."

No signs of Isaac that day, nor the next; but the following one Ann got a letter from him —a letter! a great event in those days, in remote country places. Isaac was "a beautiful scollard, he could write like a lawyer." He told her he was coming home that evening, specifying the road he should take. She might come to meet him. Go to meet him!—of course she would! So, joyfully telling her little ones, over and over, that "father was coming home," she put the last pinch of coarse sugar into their mouths,—it was all she had to give them—took a drink of water to still her sharp craving for food, locked up the cottage, and set off, one child, as usual, on each arm.

She walked on—on—on; every turn of the road must, she thought, bring him in sight. On—on—till she was sinking with fatigue; on, till she could no longer stand, and was obliged, as she said, to "sit down anywhere." But he never came, and she went back as empty-handed

as ever. Two days later, another letter: he had been unavoidably prevented from coming, he said; would not fail this time. So off she set again, though she did not go so far; and again with the same result. A third time, and once more the credulous Ann set out. He declared most solemnly he would be with her this day, and it seemed more probable, for this day was Saturday. Miles and miles she went; Jacob, only a tiny child, was made to walk by her side, till his little legs gave way under him. At length—at length she was rewarded. There was Isaac! Oh, how glad she was! But where were the horses and cart, and what was he carrying?

"You see, Nance, my gal, I've sold the cart and horses," he said, in explanation; "and this —guess what this is?"

"A bag," said Ann, as he swung his burden from his shoulders; "and inside—why, it's a pig, is n't it, Isaac?"

"Aye, a dead pig, Nancy, as I won in a raffle. I thought I must bring home something."

"How came you to sell the horses and cart? But, of course, you got a deal of money for them?"

"Humph! not so very much."

"You'll give me some, Isaac, won't you?" Ann said, plaintively. "Oh! we've been so bad off whilst you was out, those dear childer and I. Never had a fire in the house for three weeks, and the boxes full of our nice clothes all mildewed with the damp. And we never had a bellyful of vittles the whole time!"

"Well, you won't be much better off now, then," said Isaac, moodily; "for I haven't got a halfpenny, nor a ha'porth of nothing, beyond the pig!"

Ann's very lips turned white. Not got a halfpenny! Oh, heaven! what was to become of them? She had placed both children on the ground, and stood the picture of despair. There also lay the pig in its bag, and husband and wife gazed at each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SABBATH.

"Again the day returns of holy rest."—HYMN.

"MOTHER, I be so hungry!" lisped Jacob, as he sat in the road.

"I thought you'd be pleased with piggy, Nance," said Isaac, putting on a much-injured air. "Such a pig is worth — oh, ever so much!"

"Who is a-going to buy it?" asked his wife, her dry lips forming the words with difficulty. "This is Saturday night; there is no time to go anywhere with it, and meantime the children are starving."

"Curse the children?" cried Isaac. "Do you care more about them than me? Ain't I starving as much as ever they are?"

"Whose fault is it, Isaac, as we are all so bad off?"

"That's a confounded nice way to speak to a man when he comes back after being away so long! It is enough to make him stay away altogether!".

Mute and hopeless, Ann turned to raise the youngest child in her arms. Her strength was utterly spent: she had pressed on and on, thinking to ride back in the cart.

"Come, Nance, my girl!" said her husband, more kindly, "don't be cast down. I'm sorry if I spoke hasty like, but I've had a d—d deal to bother me. Don't bear malice, now!"

Ann relented, but her tears broke out. "Oh! you've ruined us, Isaac!"

"Don't you go and say that, Nancy. Keep a good heart, old gal!"—an epithet he always used when he meant to be affectionate—"never mind what is past, and I'll soon make a fresh start, and get on like a house a-fire!"

"Look here!" he continued, "you carry the pig. I'm as tired as a horse. I'll take one

child, and then you'll be able to manage very well. Consider, you've been stopping quiet at home, and I've been tearing all over the country. Jacob, don't squall, or I'll knock your head! Go on, Nan! The pig's heavier than both children."

Poor Ann reached home, more dead than alive, loaded like a packhorse. Her Saxon fortitude and powers of endurance were taxed to the uttermost. Her husband's momentary gleam of kindness had vanished; he was dogged and sullen; the children were asleep, and there was nothing for it that night but to try to forget bodily discomfort and mental wretchedness in sleep also.

Ann's aching limbs allowed her but little repose; she awoke very early, and lay thinking.

It was Sunday: the day when the cottager is supposed to go to church—clean, and happy, and well fed—prayer-book in hand, his wife and children by his side, to hear and think of a better world, while the cares of this are laid aside and forgotten.

Her heart full of gnawing anxiety, the most urgent wants of the present world pressed sore on Ann this Sabbath morn. No money, no credit (for not a soul would now trust the couple, Isaac's character was so well known); a heavy arrear of rent due, for which their goods would probably be seized. Jacob was awake also, sobbing and crying piteously for food. "Food, food!" it must be had, or they would die!

With a sudden resolution she rose, leaving the children in bed with Isaac, went down, drawn double by weakness as she was; and with a word of prayer to her Father in heaven to forgive her for desecrating His holy day, cut up the pig, which lay where she had dragged it the night previous, just within the threshold, its carcase looking white and tempting in the dim daylight, and carried the joints round and sold them amongst the neighbours; and then—start not, pious reader, who, after sitting in your soft-cushioned pew, following the church-service from your crimson, gold-clasped prayer-book, and listening complacently to your vicar's excel-

lent sermon, who after this come home to a luxurious meal, start not at what follows!—then Ann went to the village shop, which in those days was not closed on Sunday morning against ready-money customers, and bought firing, tea and sugar, and butter, peas to boil with her pig's head (the only part she had reserved); a bar of soap, which her cleanly instincts would not allow her to be happy without; and two or three quartern loaves of bread—for, she thought to herself, "she would have a bit of bread if she 'd nothing else; then, stepping to the landlord's, she paid him ten shillings towards the rent, and with one and tenpence still in hand, returned home rejoicing, and thanking God for His goodness to her. And surely He who would not have His disciples reproved for plucking the ears of corn (though they were not in the extreme of need), and who in His infinite tenderness and graciousness declared that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," did not spurn the prayer or disdain the praise of that humble, innocent heart; even though Ann had been guilty,

and had caused Mrs. Jones, at the village shop, to be guilty of Sunday-trading.

The Sabbath-bells—those bells of which so much has been said and felt, and written—which tell of hope, and peace, and rest from toil, which recall the walk across the sunny fields to their sound, the cool church with the flickering shadows of the trees that bend over many a grave, playing on its stone pavement; the venerable village pastor delivering the sacred messages of love and forgiveness to the flock to whom he is as a father; the kindly greetings by the rustic porch; the blessed repose and calm, the breathing-time between the struggle of one week and the turmoil of another: those bells that whisper to the young and ardent in their disappointment, to the aged in their world-weariness, promises of that eternal Sabbath, when "the dead who die in the Lord shall rest from their labours:" those bells were ringing as Ann re-entered her cottage, and prepared breakfast. She made the tea, cut inviting slices of bread-and-butter, and thought how nice it was to have a fire, and to be again

busied in pleasant household cares. Not a taste of anything would she have until Isaac partook. With joyful haste she went and called him, and brought down the children. Jacob soon was happy, with his hands and mouth full of bread-and-butter. Isaac came swinging into the room; his wife's bright smile died away at sight of his face. Instead of being satisfied and grateful, the brute swore at her for not having bought beefsteaks, and said she might eat her bread-and-butter herself, and be—we will not say what—to her! Here was a damper: Ann's short-lived joy was extinguished at once. Are some of the tenderest and best hearts never to know happiness except in briefest glimpses?

He soon found out that she had one and tenpence left, which he wrung from her, and went off to buy the meat.

Discord, contention, cruel words from the only person in the world from whom she could look for kindness! "Oh, God, be merciful — be merciful!"

Isaac came in with his beefsteak, and made

her cook it for him. Like a patient slave, she obeyed, but it was no longer a labour of love; and her husband, having eaten as much as he could, fell asleep in his chair.

Ann felt like a heathen as she watched the people coming from church; she felt as if she and hers had no part with the holy and good. Her mind was a chaos of fears and ignorance, and strange thoughts. She wished she had some one to open her heart to; she brought out her Bible, as she sat by the table near the window; but tears fell thick and fast on the page. Then her baby wanted attending to, and then Isaac woke up, and grumbled for beer; and so the Sabbath wore itself away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

"Those that do teach young babes, do it with gentle means and easy tasks."—SHAKESPEARE.

Two or three days after Isaac's return all his goods were seized—he was "sold up for rent;" his payments being three months in arrear. In this extremity Mr. Askew came forward and offered to take in the forlorn family at the Kiln. Ann sorrowfully gave a last look at her favourite household chattels—hers no longer; and being turned out of the cottage before daybreak, on a piercingly cold frosty morning, the little party set off to walk to the Kiln, a distance of three miles. Isaac had charge of his first-born, whom, to save himself the trouble of carrying, he perched on a brewer's dray, which happened to be going the same way. The result of this

arrangement was, that the miserable child was nearly frozen to death. His face was blue and his limbs cold as ice, and but for the kind attention of his grandmother, who chafed his stiffened frame, and laid him on a blanket before the fire, this would probably have been Jacob's first and last ride.

For some months the houseless, destitute family were most kindly entertained at the Kiln; now that Isaac had no longer the superintendence of the business, it was going on much better. Isaac had a nice idle time; nominally working for his father and looking out for something to do—for this "fresh start," of which he talked so much—in reality lounging about and drinking with the men. Ann felt great regret at continuing so long a burden to the kind old man and his wife, although affairs at the Kiln were more prosperous. That they were so, was in great measure owing to the present Mrs. Askew, the "second grandmother," as the children, when old enough, were taught to term

her. She was a sensible, clever woman, a good manager, and kind-hearted. Her son by her former husband, a skittle-ball maker, allowed her the weekly pension of which mention has been made, and about this time some more money was left her by a legacy. She was a tailoress by trade, and manufactured caps and waistcoats for all the family, made old clothes come out almost as good as new, turned everything to the best account, and never spent her own money selfishly. Her daughter was married to a respectable man in excellent circumstances, so that Mrs. Askew was free to do her best for the family into which somewhat late in life she had entered. Somewhat late for matrimony; in years she was not much past fifty, hale, vigorous, and active. Isaac hated her; she had no business to be in his mother's place, he ungratefully said. She did not like him, but she was a good friend to Ann; and the youthful Jacob, whilst at the Kiln, lived in clover; he had beautiful little coats and caps of "granny's"

making, and his own small chair in the chimney corner, with as much nice food, and sweets too, as any little boy could possibly desire.

Isaac appeared in no hurry to leave his comfortable quarters; in a figurative sense he was ready, like a child, to "open his mouth and shut his eyes," and see what fate or luck, or chance, would give him.

His father's endless indulgence and patience with Isaac, surprised many who did not know all the reasons that influenced the old man. In the first place Isaac was the youngest of a large family, the son of his father's old age, and, as such, had a sort of prescriptive right to extra fondness and care. Then his mother had, on her drunken death-bed, prayed God—she who had not prayed for years—to protect her darling helpless son, and with her last breath implored those around her to care for him. And there is a solemnity connected with the last utterances of the dead, even of the worthless dead, that haunts us, and we dread to disobey them. Then was he not in temper and disposition the very

image of that mother? Was he to blame that he had inherited her strong passions, her violent temper, her drunkenness, her jealousy? The curse of her evil tendencies had fallen on him: should not his father pity him, and help him to bear it? Who should, if not his father? Was it not said in Scripture, "Like as a father pitieth his own children"? So argued this good, simple, true-hearted man; and however erring, however sinful or foolish Isaac might have been, old Askew never turned a deaf ear to his cry for help. He also felt deeply for his daughter-in-law. "Ann," he would say, "God knows you have put up with enough from that man; and I too have put up with not a little." The loss of his arm, too, and his consequent helplessness, was a strong argument in Isaac's favour—disabled, crippled so young.

Indeed, Isaac got extensive sympathy on this account, more than did him any good, or rather the mode in which this sympathy generally showed itself was pernicious. His father's customers, with some such remark as "Poor young

fellow—poor Ikey—what a sad thing!" would ask him into the nearest public to drink, or perhaps have a regular jollification at their expense; and Isaac's spirit was such that he would always give them a return in kind;—as he expressed it, "he'd sell his clothes, but what he'd be as good as his mates."

His fresh start in life was the charge of a toll-gate; his father got him the appointment, thinking it a nice easy business for a man with one arm.

In this turnpike, or "pike," as it is popularly called, Isaac and his wife might have done exceedingly well, "if," as Ann expressed it, "they had both pulled one way." They "took money as fast as they could take it." Ann kept the accounts, and made out the papers for him; at least she did the writing part, and he dictated: "he always," said Ann, "knew what to say." It was the old story; for a time he was steady and prosperous, but soon relapsed; the more money he took the more he drank. Ann often

had to get up in the middle of the night and hurry down to attend to the gate, which he was either too much intoxicated or too indolent to do. Sometimes, when only about "half-seas over," he would be dreadfully quarrelsome, and not knowing what he was about, dispute with the drivers of carts and carriages which came that road, cursing and swearing at them for coming through in the night. It had been arranged between his wife and him, that they should sit up on alternate nights; the one whose turn it was to enjoy unbroken rest retiring early. But Ann's rest was seldom unbroken, for when Isaac sat up he would constantly neglect the gate and adjourn to the "night public house" hard by, as being much more lively and entertaining than a lonely watch. One night when Ann, quite worn out with having to be on the alert on his nights as well as her own, went to bed, leaving him, after begging him to be steady; he remained at his post for some time, and then slipped out to have just one drop of something hot;

there were no carriages or carts about that night so what was the good of sitting there? He would be back in time to let the mail coach through. However, in the charms of brandy-and-water, and a companion or two he met at the night-house, he forgot all about the mail coach. Ann, depending on her husband, was sunk in profound slumber, when, at its usual time, it came by. The coachman, finding himself stopped, was naturally indignant, and slashed his whip against the windows to wake the lazy inhabitants of the "pike." The crashing in of the glass roused Ann with a start. Immediately guessing the cause she sprung from her bed, and, blushing with shame at her husband's conduct, flew down just as she was, and let the coach through. The coachman cursed and swore at her, and Isaac, returning shortly after, did the same when he found the windows broken.

Of course Askew lost his post; everybody pitied Ann, and said it was not her fault: but that was small consolation.

Grieved and angry, Mr. Askew knew not

what was to be done with Isaac. The young man begged to be put into a public-house. If he was always in the midst of drink, he argued, he should never wish for any. Yes, the very thing for him would be to go into the "public line."

With astonishing want of judgment Mr. Askew yielded, and "started" his son in a "beer-house," called the "Ship," on Littlewood Common, a furze-grown piece of waste land, of a mile or more in extent, that lay between Crow's Nest and the Dell.

Ann entered with him on this new life with fear and trembling. Of course the additional temptation to drink his own beer was not one Isaac was likely to resist, nor did he resist it long.

Meantime Ann had various troubles with her children. "Young Ann," as she was called, playing with Jacob by the hearth in her little night-dress, approached too near. She had dropped her slice of bread-and-butter, and, stooping to pick it up, the light garment caught

fire, and before Jacob's terrified "Mother, mother! Nan's all of a blaze!" brought Ann to the rescue, the child was so fearfully burnt that, for some time, her life was despaired of. For a fortnight she lay on her mother's lap, her sufferings were so great that Ann could not put her down. But "young Ann" pulled through—it is astonishing what the children of the poor *do* pull through—and trotted about again with scarcely a scar.

A greater trial was Isaac's persistent dislike of his son, which indeed seemed, as the boy grew older, often to amount to hatred. Poor Jacob had a hard time of it—nothing he did was right; and if he did nothing it appeared to be equally offensive to his prejudiced parent. Jacob was a harmless lad, rather slow, perhaps, but less mischievous and actively troublesome than most boys naturally are. In general he bore his father's treatment with a quiet, dogged patience, although for the slightest fault, or for no fault at all, his father would give way to a violent outbreak of passion against him. On one occasion

Isaac had a job of furze, or "fuz" cutting, and was also employed in taking up, or, as it is termed, "grubbing" the roots of some trees that had been felled for timber; and, as usual, took Jacob with him. Although but a little thing "in petticoats and trousers," the child could help collect the furze and faggots, and "grub" the earth away from the tree-roots, after his father had loosened them with his pickaxe, and be made useful in many ways. It was one of his duties to fetch his father's breakfast, with which he always hastened back at his best speed. However, it happened that on this particular morning, the weather being bitterly cold, Ann ventured to keep him whilst she heated a little broth, and made him drink it to warm his perished limbs. Not heeding, or even hearing, the reason of the short delay, Isaac flew upon the unfortunate child, and, after beating him furiously, almost cut his eye out with a furze-stick. Unmoved at the boy's agony, the inhuman man drove him into the hole, where he had been previously grubbing at the tree-roots,

and stood over him to make him work. Another man, who was working with Askew, shocked at his cruelty, ran to Ann and told her that he believed, unless she came and interfered, Isaac would kill his son. Ann hastened to the spot, and dragging Jacob from the pit, wrapped her gown round him, receiving the strokes meant for the boy, whose infuriated father still pursued his victim, until her own legs were black and blue: Askew declaring that "he would kill the young scoundrel, and her too." She said the boy could not and should not work, and at length got him away, the blood pouring from a fearful gash in his cheek—the scar of which Jacob will carry to his grave—and took him to the doctor's to have the wound sown up.

Askew was cruel, though in a less degree, to "young Ann," as he had been to her mother before the child's birth, shaking her until the breath was nearly out of her body if she merely uttered a childish cry, or placing her, when a mere infant, in her high child's chair with her face to the wall. When she grew older, "young

Ann, in fits of passion, as strong in their way as her father's, enraged at being unable to escape from the chair, into which she was firmly fastened by the stick put across in front, would kick vehemently with her small feet against the wall, until sometimes the chair would overbalance, and it and young Ann go backwards to the floor together with a fearful crash. It was seldom Ann dared interfere, unless in extreme cases, for she only drew down worse punishment, and crueller usage on the children. Of the two alternatives it was better to let the girl scream herself black in the face, and have a great fall, than take her out of the chair when her father had placed her in it, and provoke fiercer wrath, which, like that of the ancient heathen deities, might take some unknown and terrible form.

Askew did not think of the ill effects such violence must have on his children's minds, far worse than on their bodies. The tender flesh might bleed or swell, yet in time would heal again; but the wounds inflicted on the young spirit, the dawning character of the little helpless

creature, sent to him fresh from God, these not the most consummate skill could cure; these they must bear with them in their souls, rankling, deteriorating, degrading, through the world; and—awful thought!—perhaps even beyond the limits of the world! It has been said by one of our greatest living writers, that "He who has been born has been a 'first man,' has had lying before his young eyes, and as yet unhardened into scientific shapes, a world as plastic, infinite, divine, as ever lay before the eyes of Adam himself." To the fresh child-soul all is beautiful, true, wondrous; and woe to those who make its first earthly experience violence, falsehood, the hideous deformity of vice, who dim for it prematurely "the sunshine and the glory which is brighter than the sun."

An old Roman philosopher said, "The greatest reverence is due to a boy;" and however those around him may reverence his youth, and innocence, and purity, a knowledge of the great Babylon world, with its iniquities, comes to him only too soon. It must come, God has so

ordained; but not, oh not till the young neophyte is trained and prepared, forewarned and armed, not until his young virtue is strengthened, not until his father, his teachers, have, with the Divine help, put on him "the whole armour of God," and placed in his hand the "shield of faith, wherewith he may be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked."

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRUGGLE AND THE CALM.

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."—SHAKESPEARE.

"Her soft deep eyes look through my dreams,
Tender and sadly sweet;
Tell her my heart within me burns
Once more that gaze to meet."—MRS. HEMANS.

IT will not much surprise those who have followed the fortunes of Isaac Askew thus far, to hear that before a year was out, he had ruined a good business, was over head and ears in debt, and fairly drunk himself out of the public-house of which he might, if moderately sober, have been landlord at the present day.

Destitution again for him and his family, now increased by another child, born during the latter part of his stay at the inn. He didn't care, he said; they would take a little cottage

on some other part of Littlewood Common—a large, rambling, wild place, that common—and get work: he could turn his hand to anything.

"Never tell me," he would say to neighbours who wanted advice—or who didn't—and to his boys in after years—"never tell me of not being able to do this and that; I'd die afore I'd say I *couldn't* do a thing—one-armed man as I am!" And certainly, nothing seemed to come in his way that he could not do, except—fatal exception!—to resist the allurements of drink and bad company, and restrain his passionate temper.

The cottage they took was small and mean indeed, but the rent was low, and Ann thought she could manage to pay it, and at least "keep a roof over their heads." Isaac had no difficulty in getting work of various kinds, and, had he brought home his earnings, they might have got on; but often, after staying away from home all the week, he would come back on Saturday night (as his wife expressed it) "without stick, stone, or feather," and be fearfully angry if food was not forthcoming, saying his wife ought to keep the

family by her lacemaking; or he would mak strange, unprofitable investments: as, for instance, bringing home two great dogs, which he did on one occasion; thus adding fresh mouths to be filled by Ann, who could scarcely find a morsel for herself and the children. It might, indeed, be said that Ann fed the family—when the family *was* fed—with her own earnings, scanty as these were, except in hay and harvest time: and, as she truly declared, "she never had a mouthful o' nothing but she saved half for Isaac." The dogs were, perforce, tied up outside. Isaac was off again: Ann gave the poor brutes all that she had, even to her own share of the last loaf; still they "almost tore the place down" with hunger. It added to Ann's own sufferings to see them. She "could not give them the children's bread;" there were no crumbs, for the children, alas! were almost famished, Ann herself little more than a skeleton. Yet there is something acutely painful in the sight of brute suffering—the creatures God has made dependent on us, and which have (so

far as we know) but this world to look to; and as these dogs (noble animals they were) looked at her with a beseeching, half-human expression in their bright fierce eyes, rending the air day and night with their howls, Ann's heart ached so that she took a desperate resolution. Of food the dogs had not had "a bit in their lips" for three days; she could bear it no longer. Unfastening one, whose agonies seemed the greatest, she led it forth, crying as she went. The poor dog followed readily; he was a "dare-devil," with spirit for anything. Perchance he thought, in his dog's heart, his misery was now going to end. So it was,—but not with a full meal, and revived strength to his gaunt frame. On Ann went, to the banks of a large piece of water in a deserted gentleman's park, clear and deep, with young waterlilies shining on its brown waves, with wild, high trees overhead, bursting into spring verdure, known amongst the country folks as the Quaive, or the Great Quaive—for it covered an extent of some acres. Here she stood still, and taking a large stone

she had brought with her, fastened it round the dog's neck. Courage, Bruno! your poor mistress suffers the most, as she turns away with a sob, to avoid the trusting yet pitiful gaze of those eyes of blended diamond and jet; it will soon be over! With trembling hand she plunges him in,—a splash, a gurgle, a drowning cry, and the waters of the Great Quaive are still again, and Bruno's sufferings are ended. Back home once more. She had intended to repeat the tragedy; but no, she cannot, for the world! she feels already like a murderess. What must she do with Bruno's companion, a meeker, gentler dog, for some time showing symptoms of exhaustion? But Bruno's companion saved her the trouble of thought. As she looks pityingly towards its old tub-kennel, the animal staggers, moans, falls: its eyes are glazing; the breath of life has fled!

A sharp but fruitless struggle with want and poverty, with their thousand ills, during which Ann more than once was tempted to wish that the Great Quaive was her resting-place as well

as Bruno's, and the family were once more worse than penniless. A kind, rich lady in the neighbourhood, Lady Grantham, took pity on Ann, left forlorn and destitute, and sent her butler down to ask what she wanted most. Ann truly said, "they were as good as homeless," only bare walls and a roof remaining. The good lady sent her down a bed and bedding, two blankets and a cradle, also a stack of wood—coals were in that neighbourhood unknown among the poor and middling classes — and through this seasonable help Ann was enabled to get on for some time. She was careful and thrifty, and years afterwards could show the remnant of Lady Grantham's brown curtains, bound with yellow, converted into petticoats for her girls.

Isaac had already thrown away more good chances of getting on in the world than many have offered them in their whole lifetime. The next came through his wife.

A gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had great respect for Ann and for the Howard

family, offered Ann the charge of a great house, then standing empty. She was to be paid for her services and receive milk and other advantages; to live with her children in the house, called Snowball Castle—curiously enough, as Ann thought, the very house whose grounds contained the memorable Quaive — may the martyred Bruno rest quietly in those dim depths beneath the broad-leaved waterlilies! — while Isaac was to work at the Kiln (as a labourer, not in his old capacity of foreman), and come home to his family once a week.

This all sounded very pleasant, and Ann was delighted; but she had been so constantly disappointed, and all her bright hopes dashed to the ground, that she was afraid, as she said, "to be too much lifted up" at her prospects.

She was right; for, although no longer suffering from the ills of poverty, she had, under this new dispensation, other trials to bear.

Captain Simpson, the gentleman to whom Snowball Castle belonged, was a gay, wild sort

of man, who, unable to keep up the house and grounds left him by his father in proper style with his very inadequate means, had abandoned the place to reside with a brother recently come into possession of a small living a few miles off. He came occasionally, at first, to see how Ann got on; then he walked or drove over more frequently, until he was almost a daily visitor, and would remain at the Castle all day. He was idle and dissipated. Ann's beauty and simplicity charmed him—now that she was happier and better fed, her good looks had returned—he "liked a chat with her," he said, and won her heart by his attention to the children, giving them rides on his back, bringing them toys and cakes, and putting up for their amusement a great swing in one of the cowsheds, where he had many a merry game both with the children and their mother; for Ann was still young, and she had had so little mirth or merriment in her life, it was so new, so strange, so delightful to have a lively, good-tempered person to take

notice of her, and she was naturally flattered at such courtesy and condescension from a gentleman.

Had she been more experienced in the world's ways, she would have been struck by the singularity of Captain Simpson's conduct, and startled instead of pleased at his looks of passionate admiration and at his constantly insinuated compliments.

It was not long, however, before even Ann could not but perceive that Captain Simpson had fallen desperately in love with her, and she found with sorrow and humiliation that he entertained towards her the most dishonourable intentions. Rebuked by her virtue and truth to Isaac, he expressed contrition, promised solemnly never to revert to the subject, and prayed her to forgive him, and not betray him to her husband, but to consider him her sincere friend as before. Ann did not turn a deaf ear to this appeal to her generosity; she liked Captain Simpson extremely as a friend; had they both been free and in the same rank of life, she

would never have regarded him in any other light. He was plain, with sandy hair, a freckled complexion, and a large red nose; which was such a remarkable feature that the children laughed at it, and Ann would sometimes hush her infant to sleep with a sort of nursery rhyme celebrating it, beginning—

"Captain Simpson's got a red nose,
Got a red nose,
Got a red nose!"

By which it might be reasonably inferred that she did not feel very sentimental towards her would-be lover.

He still continued to come, and was always to be seen near Ann; if she was in the orchard gathering fruit or hanging out clothes, he would repose on the grass at her feet, or take her child from her arms and dance it about.

Of course, Captain Simpson's visits (though he did not know of half of them) excited Isaac's jealousy, especially as he was so much away from home; he had no faith in his wife, and his cruel doubts and unjust insinuations caused

her many a pang. He had that fearful powe over her that a woman's early fall gives. "You know, Nancy," he would say, looking blackly at her, and grinding his teeth with rage, when his evil passions were excited, "you was too fas with me before we were married, and how can I tell you are not with others?" Poor Ann would be silenced; how could she make him feel that love in the one case made all the difference—that she had erred from the very intensity and self-abandonment of that love? She had sacrificed her maidenly reserve, her self-respect, for him—little as a man like Isaac could appreciate the sacrifice—and this was her reward!

On the other side it must be said that Isaac still loved his beautiful wife—in his way, that he had never really loved another woman, and that his sufferings from jealousy were fierce and real enough. When under the influence of strong passion, he was as one whom a demon possessed—irrational, mad, reckless of conse-

quences; but in his lucid intervals good-natured and pleasant—if no one crossed him.

A young married woman called Mary Home, with whom Ann was very intimate, or rather who chose to be very intimate with Ann, about this time, was far less modest and less scrupulous than her friend; she came constantly to Snowball Castle, neglecting her own home, and was, as she termed it, "up to any larks." She had many "larks" with Captain Simpson, although he greatly preferred Ann, who got the credit of Mary's wild, foolish conduct. If Ann had been wiser and firmer, she would have "cut" Mary Home—though that would certainly have been difficult, for Mary was one of those bold, care-for-nothing girls who are not easily affronted. She had no beauty, and but little wit; Ann at first disliked, but afterwards got accustomed to see her tall figure appear at the doorway almost every afternoon. Ann had not been taught the prudence of choosing her companions well; she did not know the wise

proverb, "Tell me what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are"—a severe saying, but one of the justice of which few have a right to complain.

One day, during a visit of Captain Simpson's, owing to Mary Home's romping, hoydenish behaviour, Ann's wash-pan got broken. Ann was trying to go quietly on with her daily occupations; the children saw the accident, and exclaimed with horror, "What will father say?" Captain Simpson immediately gave seven and sixpence to buy another; but Isaac came home this day — he had a way, like Bluebeard, of turning up when least expected, and always at the most inopportune moments—and somehow he found out what had happened—it is astonishing how some people, of a suspicious temperament, *do* find out everything!—and he swore, and stormed, and drove away all peace from the house. He was one of those who, when anything goes wrong, bluster and fly into a rage, instead of patiently setting to work to trace out the cause, and quietly put matters

right. With kind advice, and the teaching of a mind stronger than her own, his wife, docile, loving, and far from devoid of sense as she was, might have been made anything of. A gentle, wise remonstrance of his, and she would have dismissed Mary Home, and given Captain Simpson to understand that his visits were not agreeable to her husband; but the vehemence of the latter disgusted her, and made her reluctant to turn away friends from whom she at least received kind and courteous treatment.

Ann stayed at Snowball Castle several years, and, notwithstanding these occasional storms, enjoyed more peace and happiness than had been hers since her marriage. Her children grew and throve: her third child, called Susan, three years and a-half junior to young Ann, was a pretty, interesting girl; and, strange to say, while Isaac continued bitter in spirit and in deed towards his firstborn son and daughter, this girl, and other children subsequently born to him, "never," as Ann expressed it, "so much as felt the weight of their father's finger."

And so time passed on, and it was ten years since Ann had left Crow's Nest, and all that time no communication of any kind had taken place between her and its inhabitants.

About this period Ann felt a strange, renewed yearning towards her early home; feelings which had long slept awoke to fresh life; she saw again all her family in dreams, vivid as realities —especially the face of one fair young sister, a child when she left, now in the first bloom of womanhood, yet the face Ann sees is pale and grave—so grave—with eyes now tear-dimmed, now upturned, glistening as if with some far-off, unseen radiance. So strong were these impressions that Ann could not but think the mysterious chord of sympathy, never broken between hearts once closely united, was played upon and vibrated to its old music. "I cannot help thinking," she said one day, "that we shall hear something of the Crow's Nest people before long. I do dream of 'em so, 'most every night, and of Charlotte more than any."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD HOME.

"So wise, so young, they say, do ne'er live long."

SHAKESPEARE.

"I fell not, for I was not tried,
And in me, youthful, still survived
The peace, the truth my Maker gave;
They might have withered had I lived,
But grow immortal on my grave."

From IX. POEMS BY V.

TEN years! What changes, outward and inward; what events, what experiences will ten years bring about! So short to look back upon; so long to look forward to!

Good Farmer Howard had altered the least of the Crow's-nest family; his locks were somewhat thinner, but his cheek was as ruddy, his eye as bright, as when he first stood before us. He was kindly, too, as ever, trusting, believing,

taking always the best view of matters, the most charitable view of persons. The Dame had not worn so well; her irritable temper had brought more lines and wrinkles into her face than ought to have been there—more than her eight or nine and forty years justified in an Englishwoman. Her youngest child, just the age of Susan Askew, was between four and five years old: John, a fine young man, of five-and-twenty, was on the point of getting married; the stout comely Sally was gone to service in the family of a gentleman who lived some two or three miles off, to whom a sister of her mother's was housekeeper, and Sally was courted by the gardener. Will still worked with his father, learning the science of farming. Charlotte was nineteen, a thoughtful girl, tall, and white, and fragile as a lily; delicate from childhood, the sallow hue of her cheeks had given place to a waxen unnatural clearness; her peevish temper had softened into gentleness; and a deep religious feeling, at first fitful, had become rooted and constant. She had always been a strange child, unlike the

rest of the family; if, worn by pain or sickness, she had been cross or petulant, she would rise from her bed in the night, and kneel, praying in low murmuring tones for forgiveness: if any of the children woke up and noticed her, she would shrink even from their observation, begging them "not to tell mother." Of late this habit of midnight devotion had grown upon her; she would kneel for hours, as in wrapt communion with Heaven. She was always pale and thin; and those constantly near her did not observe that she was growing paler and thinner every day. Her thoughts seemed to dwell much upon her absent sister, Ann, her tender nurse in childhood. One day, when her mother observed that she seemed ill and weak, she said, "Ah, yes, poor Nanny! wouldn't she be kind to me now?" Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. Mrs. Howard glanced at her furtively, as she herself went on arranging the saucepans on the fire; but though this was a forbidden name, she did not reprove her daughter. Something very like a sigh seemed struggling to

escape from her breast, but she smothered it with a cough. To show that she was not sentimental, she began talking to Charlotte about the new bonnet and dress that the girl was to have. "You'd better go to Aylesford, my dear, and choose them for yourself. The walk will brighten you up a bit, and give you a colour again." "Very well, mother," Charlotte answered quietly; and the next day she went. She came home, after being absent a long while, looking deadly white.

"What is the matter; and why have you been so long gone?" asked her mother.

"Because I felt so ill, I had to sit down a great many times. I thought I should never have got home," she answered, faintly; "but I've bought some nice things."

"Why, they're all black!" exclaimed Mrs. Howard, turning pale, as she undid the parcels. "For Heaven's sake, what do you want with black? You are not in mourning!"

"It is all right, mother," Charlotte answered, looking earnestly at Mrs. Howard.

"It's not right," cried the Dame. "I shall send them back. A black bonnet, ribbon, and all!"

"Let them stay, mother; I shall never want them. Let poor Nan have the things; they'll do for her when——. And oh, mother, mother!" she cried, clasping her hands, while her whole face flushed with excitement, "send for Nan: let me see her before I die!"

"Die, child!" said Mrs. Howard, brushing away a tear with great vehemence: "what nonsense! Why should you be a-going to die, more than the rest of us? Of course, we shall all go when the blessed Lord pleases to take us. When our time is come, we must go."

Not paying much attention to her mother's commonplaces, Charlotte merely reiterated her wish to see her sister. Mrs. Howard, turned the subject, but with no unkindness of manner.

"Mother, mother!" said Emma, the child who had accompanied Charlotte, "such a great black and white bird followed us all the way: it was so funny; when we stopped, the bird

stopped; and when we went on, it went on. I think it was a magpie. We gave it some crumbs of the bun Charlotte bought me."

"A magpie — humph!" said Mrs. Howard. "They *do* say," she muttered to herself, as Charlotte left the room, "it's a token of death to be followed by a magpie."

"Do you know what Charlotte said, mother," continued Emma, "when the bird kept so close to us? She said, 'Perhaps, you won't have your sister Charlotte long.' It was such a beautiful bird, I wish we could catch it, and keep it in a cage."

"There's no good in magpies, child!" said Mrs. Howard, shortly. "Poor dear Charlotte! did she say that, though? 'Tis all nonsense, I tell you."

Charlotte seemed better again. She could not bear to be thought an invalid, and struggled hard to "do as the others did." It was harvest time; and though the mid-day heat tried her strength, towards evening much of her languor disappeared, and she would wander forth into

the garden or the nearest fields alone. She was free from all fears of darkness and solitude, so common to many of the young in her class; she enjoyed the cool freshness of the fast-closing autumn evenings, and loved to be alone with Nature and with God when the dim solemn shades fell deeper and darker on the tired earth, hushing it to soft slumber. All her life, if an errand had to be done, a message sent after dark, Charlotte had been the voluntary messenger; whilst her brothers and sister shrank from such embassies in fear. One night, about three weeks after her conversation with her mother on her return from Aylesford, she went out a short distance to fetch in a piece of lace that had been laid on the grass to bleach, and returned, pale, trembling, and greatly agitated. Surprise at a state so unusual to her, attracted the attention of all the family, and Charlotte with difficulty found breath and voice to tell them that as she was coming towards the house, she had been three times forcibly *pulled back* by the skirt of her gown. At first, she thought it was a dog,

but no dog was about; she could see nothing, and no one. What could it be, then, but a summons from the unseen world—a sign of quickly approaching death? As such, at least, she viewed it, and so, in spite of pretended disbelief, did her mother. Charlotte's agitation soon passed away; for some minutes she lay gasping and fainting in her father's large arm-chair, in which Howard tenderly placed her; then her sweet calm returned. She smiled serenely, and said, "If it is meant to warn me, why should I be afraid? God is over all!"

Yet a painful, melancholy impression remained with the other members of the family, and silently, though anxiously, they watched the ways of the doomed girl. The next day she went out earlier; she was very weak, but she got as far as the spring, from whence Ann had so often fetched the clear sparkling water with elastic step, how different from her sister's feeble faltering gait! What Charlotte thought or felt

during this her last ramble, was known to none; her ostensible object was to gather the young pointed buds of the wild hop-plant which twined its graceful vivid green tendrils over the hedges, near the spring—"hop-tops," as they are called, and which, gathered young, are a favourite dish with the farmers and peasantry in some parts of England; boiled they possess a fine rough asparagus-like flavour: her real motive perhaps was to be alone in the fresh air, in her favourite haunt, by rippling stream, rich, many-tinted hedgerow, and waving tree. On that mossy bank, sloping to the spring, where the early violets budded, and which the latest pink-and-white dog-roses overhung, her weary frame could rest more at ease than on the softest couch, while her spirit could dream of a world yet brighter and fairer.

When she got home she begged that the "hop-tops" might be boiled, and she partook of some. The next morning a great change for the worse was apparent. "Ann—Ann," she

sighed, "Let me see Nancy; darling Nancy, mother!"

With all haste a messenger was sent off, and Ann was summoned from the reaping-field, where she was at work with a heavy heart, to come and see her sister Charlotte, who was dying.

She hurried after the messenger, and arrived breathless, all heated and dishevelled as she was. She had rehearsed over and over the preparations she would make, when—if ever—she was summoned to Crow's Nest; but when he who rides on the pale horse is near, there is no time for ceremony. Better as it was—better than any preparation she could have made, was that trampling down of artificial barriers, of restraints born of long estrangement, by the feet of the horseman Death! "The deep, everlasting, divine reality of kindred," asserted its power, and the poor exile was folded once more to a mother's bosom—once more a father's blessing soothed that weary heart.

But brief were the first greetings; she was hurried to the sick-room. Charlotte instantly recognized her, and a smile—such a smile!—broke over the dying face, and lighted the fast glazing eyes. It was almost too late, yet not quite—thank God! not quite. Once more she could touch her long-lost sister's hand, for one brief moment see her beautiful face, the golden hair like a halo; hear that soft yet thrilling voice—ah! she will take those tones, that look of the loving eyes, as tenderest, holiest memories of earth, with her to the Celestial City. That city opens its gates, one more bright soul has entered there; one more pale lifeless maiden form is wept over by friends on earth. She had brought about the reconciliation, what matter that her own days below were few? Every family has its tradition of one like Charlotte—"the rose cut down in spring"—a fair gentle being, of strange, sweet, unearthly ways, prematurely ripe in hope and faith, yearning to return to the heavenly home, ere the world has dimmed

the lustre of the young spirit, or time brought one line to the smooth brow. Such souls seem to repel sin or impurity, as the polished mirror the steam-drops; the breath, the touch of man cannot sully either. Others need the fierce purification of suffering—the moral fire—they must be tried, tempted, buffeted by Satan; worn, scarred, bloodstained, these are victors at last, but, like their Great Master, they have worn the crown of thorns before the crown of glory. These last will receive the high honours promised to "them which have come out of great tribulation, from whose eyes God himself shall wipe all tears;" those innocents, those pure young souls—may they not be the "virgins," the "undefiled," who are "without fault before God," and whose blessed privilege it is to follow the "Lamb"—the Immaculate and Perfect One—whithersoever He goeth?

Not even this sad event could destroy, much as it might damp, the happiness of the reunion. The tender-hearted farmer fairly cried with joy

that this had come about. How he had longed and prayed for this day! And now—now what love, repentance, forgiveness, sorrow! what whispered, tearful confessions! yet with a deep undercurrent of peace flowing through all.

Of course Ann had the half-mourning cotton dress, and the black bonnet-ribbon intended for her by her sister; and Mrs. Howard, who could neither love nor hate by halves, showed much kindness to her now restored daughter and her children. The days of mourning were soothed by the sight of the three grandchildren, who thought Crow's Nest Farm the most delightful place they had ever seen in their little lives, especially as it became associated to them with wonderful puddings and cakes, while Grandmother Howard seemed a being to be looked up to with almost superstitious reverence,—a sort of mysterious, all-powerful personage, with stores of food, and clothes, and toys, inexhaustible as a magician's. Young Ann and Susan were presented with some huge woooden dolls, which

afforded unmitigated delight, until Jacob, in whose memory a dim recollection of the fate of Bruno and his companion lingered, thought proper to make a sort of commemoration of that event by drowning the dolls, each with a pebble round its neck, in the Great Quaive!

CHAPTER XVII.

ISAAC MOVES ON.

"Thy head is as full of quarrels, as an egg is full of meat."
SHAKESPEARE.

THERE were several things that surprised Ann at Crow's Nest, now that intercourse was renewed after so long an interval, and nothing more excited her wonder than the over-indulgence shown by Mrs. Howard to the young people, especially to those who were still children, so utterly different from the undue severity that had been exercised towards herself; and the evil results of the spoiling system promised to be greater than those that had attended the strict one. Every member of the family would do and say things which Ann would never have dared, or even dreamed of doing or saying. Charlotte had been the only exception. Mary,

the next to her in age, was a bold, romping, forward girl, selfish and indolent; the plainest of the family, but (as often happens in that case) the most vain. She very early thought more of dress and of showing off her person than her handsomer sisters ever did in their lives. Emma, the curly-haired pet of Ann's early years, was meek, quiet, and well-disposed by nature; something like Charlotte in conscientiousness and desire to be loved; but education, or rather the absence of it, was doing its best to spoil her, as well as Jane, who, with no pretensions to be fine and clever, was frank, straightforward, and goodnatured. The baby-brother Ann carried to the Kiln, on the memorable occasion of Isaac's accident, had fallen a victim to some of the disorders incident to childhood; the three youngest Howards, born since Ann left home, Jane, Jem, and Tom, were within a few months the same respective ages as Ann's three children; they often made the young Askews open their eyes wide with astonishment. These last having been accustomed to rebukes,

privations, and to keep their place in the background, could not understand the precocious ideas, the assured and often impertinent conduct, of their youthful aunts and uncles, and thought "how nice it must be to have one's own way so much!"

Poor little souls! Had they but known it, better for their future weal any amount of severe discipline than this fearful slackening of the reins; allowing evil desires, selfishness, the rank weeds of wild passion to grow unchecked, unnoticed.

Ann thought that even her darling brother John had not entirely escaped deterioration from this licence now permitted to him and to all; he was loveable, and retained much of his natural gentleness of manner; he was superior to the rest in character as well as beauty, though they were all good-looking and clever enough; but an occasional word or act revealed a certain amount of selfishness Ann had not previously suspected. He was about to marry a fine, showy girl, with some money, and his pride

made him anxious to appear and to be as well off as his wife. In an evil hour he yielded to temptation, and having to collect various debts owing to his father—in fact, all the money due for that year's corn and hay, amounting to a very considerable sum—forged his father's name on the receipts of the bills, and went off with the money to get married, and to start himself in business as a grocer and publican. This cruel fraud on his kind parent bitterly grieved poor Howard. "He could never have thought it of John," he said. He felt the wickedness of his favourite son's conduct even more than the loss of a year's hard earnings, which, for the time, nearly ruined him; or, as he expressed it, "stripped him for the summer, and almost broke his back."

The patriarch had had his complement of twelve children; more than one had already brought him woe. What would be the fate of the rest? Now, since Ann went away, his favourite has been Jem, the youngest but one, a black-haired, rosy-cheeked, handsome boy, of an

impudent, daring disposition, who already treats his father with very little respect. What will he be when he grows up? Ann sighs as she ponders, and regrets that she, in her time, made the poor old man's heart ache. When we have lived long enough to know grief and unkindness, we begin to feel for our parents—at least for a loving and unselfish parent—and to appreciate the affection we in earlier years took as a matter of course. Ann trusted her own children would be a comfort to her, as she looked at the little things; yet she trembled as she recollected that she had been a self-willed, disobedient daughter.

"Grandfather Askew," about the time of Ann's reconciliation with her family, "took to Jacob;" he had the child to live with him, and wished, as did his wife, to adopt the boy entirely. A year or so later the Askews gave up business, and left the Kiln, moving into Middlesex, to a farm called Jacket's Farm, Drake's Hill, where he throve and was much respected. Sarah Askew was married to a prosperous "master baker" in London; and Harriet, who

had fallen desperately in love with the fascinating bootmaker who taught her boot-binding, became his wife just before her father left the neighbourhood.

When the Askews had been settled at Jacket's Farm about two years, Captain Simpson married a rich lady, and announced his intention of coming, with his bride, to reside at Snowball Castle, and revive the pristine glories of that long-neglected place. Ann shed a few tears when she heard the news, which Captain Simpson considerately came and communicated in person, though she was glad, too, on his account. Every room in that great house, which she had so sedulously cleaned, and aired, and attended to, was dear to her, especially the large, light kitchen which had been her own and her family's sitting-room; the great outbuilding where the swing was, and where she and her children had had so many innocent games of play with their gentleman friend—Mary Home had disappeared some time since, her husband and she having left that part of the country—the wild, shady

woods, so pleasant in summer; the Quaive, with its calm waters, in which the trees were mirrored, by the side of which she had so often walked, watching the changing reflection of the blue sky and white fleecy clouds in its depths, and admiring the sylph-like, mysterious beauty of the floating water-lilies—the only drawback to this charming small lake being the constant dread she lived in that some of the children would fall in and be drowned. She liked the gentle brown and white cows she used to milk—the children will have no more delicious breakfasts, she will make the golden butter no more—the hens and cocks that flew cackling and screaming around her when she scattered the barley with liberal hand; the small chickens she has helped to rear—she loves them all, especially that speckled one, now such a fine bird (once so sickly that Ann had laid it, wrapped in flannel, by the fireside, fed it with hard-boiled egg, and despaired of its life): how she will miss them all!

Ann had another child, a boy, whom Isaac,

adhering to Scripture names—the only thing connected with Scripture that he *did* adhere to —called Joseph. During her residence at Snowball Castle, Ann had collected many nice and useful articles of furniture. Captain Simpson kindly told her not to be in a hurry to move them; he made her a handsome present, and expressed his thanks for the satisfactory manner in which she had performed her duties, and his regret at being obliged to dismiss her. Ann felt much at parting with this kind gentleman; "Though he was married to such a grand, stylish wife," she said, "he was not the least proud, but shook hands with her as hearty!"

Isaac now announced his intention of claiming parochial relief—it was in the days of the Old Poor-law. He remembered, or discovered, that his father had lived all his youth in a village not more than two or three miles from Drake's Hill, called Ickenworth; and on representing this to the parochial authorities—then rather hazy on the subject of settlement, and anxious to shift off an actual or probable burden from

themselves—they offered immediately to provide him with the means of transport to Ickenworth. So Isaac, with his wife and baby, was "passed home," as it is called. They had an order to stop at a large inn on the way, where they were "waited on like ladies and gentlemen;" Isaac was called "Sir" by an obsequious waiter, and he swaggered and gave himself airs accordingly. Ann had never enjoyed such state and luxury. She had hot water brought to her room, and a fire to dress her child by; whilst the obliging "Boots" requested, as though it had been a personal favour to himself, that the party would put their shoes outside the bedroom door to be cleaned. After an extensive breakfast, they went on to the village, and "put up" at the "Coach and Horses," the chief inn at Ickenworth, until their case could be inquired into. It was decided that they had *not* a settlement in Ickenworth, and they made the best of their way back to the old neighbourhood. Isaac had two pounds given him by the goodnatured overseer, which, of course, he spent before he got

home. After living, Ann and he scarcely knew how, for some little time, old Askew sent to propose that Isaac and his family should come to live near Drake's Hill, and got him a small cottage on Ryefields Common. Packing up all their worldly goods in a waggon drawn by three horses, which "Uncle Abraham," as he was called, Isaac's brother, had kindly brought for them, the party set out. The day was, unfortunately, wet; and their progress (being so loaded) necessarily very slow. Ann, her infant of two months old in her arms, sat upon some of the furniture, the two little girls crouched for shelter under a brown table, Isaac mounted beside his brother. Travelling all day through the more and more heavily falling rain, all began to wish themselves at their journey's end. It was drawing near, when one of the team attached to the waggon, a mare whose foal had trotted by her side all the way, and who had several times been uneasy in consequence, grew very restive. Arrived at an inn called the "White Pigeon," the last they would pass be-

fore reaching their destination, Isaac got down to have some beer, and Abraham followed him, making Ann get down also to stretch her cramped limbs, and have a warm at the fire in the inn kitchen. She did not stay above a few minutes—she felt nervous at the horses being left; true, Abraham had said they would stand very well, and that the mare only wanted to be quiet. However, the party had scarcely entered the "White Pigeon" when the mare, no longer restrained by Abraham's "woas" and "ways," plunged frantically; the other horses, probably from sympathy, began jumping round. The canal was near, and at that place the bank had been cut away with a steep slope for the purpose of watering horses. The colt uttered cries of distress, whinnying about its mother; the mare made a furious dart forward, impatiently striving to set herself free from the shackles she had borne, she thought, more than long enough; failing of course, she took to backing violently—she was the shaft, or, as it is termed, the "thill-horse"—back—back—the mare, great

powerful beast, has it all her own way; "body-horse" and "fore-horse" do not attempt to resist her. She continues to back in the pitchy darkness. A moment more, and the waggon is going rapidly down the shelving bank towards the canal. The children scream in unknown terror; Ann, rushing out, screams also; the splash and the screams bring the men out of the "White Pigeon." Abraham and Isaac are too bewildered to have any presence of mind, but fortunately some bargemen, seeing what is the matter, seize the horses' heads and arrest their downward progress. It is a narrow escape; a few yards further, and waggon, horses, goods, and children must have gone over into deep water and been lost. Ann's first care naturally was for her little ones. "Oh, my poor children!—only give me my children!" she shrieked, distractedly, and embraced them fondly when restored to her. Some of the goods had fallen off the waggon into the water; but most of these were recovered, though a great pan-

full of new home-made loaves, which they had carried off, as the Israelites of old took their leaven in their flight from Egypt, unfortunately had been shot into the water.

Isaac concerned himself very little about the accident; he declared it would have been a good job if the whole lot had been drowned. He would put the waggon, Uncle Abraham, and all, into the "cut" now, if they didn't mind! Isaac was very angry with his brother, who, he unreasonably said, had caused this misfortune by letting the foal loose before they started—it was all his fault. High words arose, and the angry passions of both were excited; they vowed they would fight each other before the night was out.

Meantime, something must be done with the family and goods. Abraham borrowed a horse from a farmer he knew, who lived near, and left the mare and foal; but Ann had been so frightened, she would ride no more. The rain still fell in torrents; the good farmer's wife,

moved with compassion, wished Ann and the children to stay all night, but Isaac would not hear of it. So Ann—carrying first one child and then the other, besides her baby—tramped along through the mud and dirt and plashing rain, after the men and the waggon. On reaching their destination, at an hour past midnight, Abraham took Isaac and his wife over the house, and whilst in one of the bedrooms the men recommenced quarrelling—indeed, they had scarcely ceased—and Isaac so provoked his brother that a regular fight ensued, which lasted a considerable time; the waggon and horses meanwhile standing in the road, not a thing as yet unloaded.

Ann ran up and down stairs in great distress, vainly urging her husband and his brother to desist from fighting, and trying to comfort her supperless, weary, crying children. Some kind neighbour had lighted a small wood fire in the empty sitting-room, and Ann contrived to drag down from the waggon one of the mat-

tresses, and, unpacking it, spread it on the bare floor. When the brothers had bruised and beaten each other, as they thought, sufficiently, Abraham took out the horses and led them to Jacket's Farm; and Isaac, his face and hand covered with blood, sullenly joined his wife as daylight was beginning to appear.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FAMILY CARES.

"Oh, such were the days which my infancy knew!"—BYRON.

NOTWITHSTANDING the evil auspices under which the new life commenced, affairs soon began to assume a more cheerful aspect.

A bright sun roused Ann from her brief slumbers, and she set about unloading the waggon in good earnest.

Isaac went out early, and returned with the good news that, thanks to his father's recommendation, he had found immediate and lucrative employment. He was to make a chalk-pit for Squire Partridge, and to sink a well for Mr. Clarkson, with a gang of a dozen or more men under him; and being thus early engaged by two of the chief landed-proprietors in the

neighbourhood, was sure to lead to similar employment in other quarters.

His father and mother in-law were cordial, and glad to see him; and the whole family, baby included, were invited to dinner at Jacket's Farm on the following day, which was Sunday, and were to have a goose.

Grandfather Askew had deservedly advanced in wealth and in the world's esteem. His farm well repaid the labour and capital expended on it; and although he had long been lame, and the infirmity increased with years, he superintended everything himself, driving about in a low chaise drawn by a strong rough pony. He was now a great man in his parish, holding several responsible offices, such as overseer, surveyor of the roads, and churchwarden.

His wife was active and useful as ever; he was very fond of her, and always addressed her as "dear," whilst her favourite epithet for him was "father." She must have owed all Mr. Askew's regard, to her mental and moral qualities, for she had not even the least remnant of

good looks, never having possessed any. In person she was tall and lean, with a shrivelled face, and eyebrows a curious mixture of red and white (which the young Askews thought very extraordinary), and a "front" of false hair to match, short and carroty, or rather, flame-coloured. Altogether, she was an object of much wonder and speculation to the children, who, with the quick perceptions of childhood, discovered that "granny was very ugly, and very funny in her ways." They did not much like eating her "toast-crusts" at tea, which she insisted on their doing; and they marvelled at the quantity of snuff she took, grains of which sometimes besprinkled their young faces and got in their eyes when she kissed them; indeed, little Susan, who was very fastidious in her way, often received these salutes with tears, although they were sweetened by many nice things which the good old lady freely bestowed. The children would (without any intentional disrespect) imitate her peculiarities out in the garden, where they were sent to play after

dinner or tea: her habit of saying "Ah, ah, ah!" in her high squeaking voice before almost every sentence; a nervous shaking of the hands, which caused strange clattering among the tea-cups when she poured out tea (Isaac, who persisted in hating her, said it proceeded from drinking on the sly—but that was a libel), her method of mincing and grimacing over her food, holding her knife and fork with the points of her fingers, her arms being bent so that her elbows formed a sharp angle. Mrs. Askew was fond of the creature comforts of life; her plateful of nice meat, her drop of something good to drink; but then she was always willing to give others belonging to her a liberal share, and none were more welcome than Ann and her children.

Isaac, not very wisely, insisted on taking the young Jacob away from this abode of comfort and plenty, where he was treated as a son, that the boy might help him work in the chalk-pits, he said. Perhaps some unworthy jealousy of Jacob's affection for his own stepmother influenced Isaac; yet he cared not to possess the

boy's affection himself—strange anomaly of perverseness! But Isaac never allowed reason or a consideration of ultimate good to weigh in the balance against a caprice of the moment—so home came poor Jacob, much to his own regret, and that of his mother, who fully felt the value of such a provision for her eldest son, especially taking into consideration the dislike entertained for that son by his father.

Isaac continued to get plenty of profitable work; the first well and chalkpit, as he expected, led to others; his cleverness and superior abilities told. He became more and more known as a first-rate man where "head" and skill were required; and as he was always "ganger," he could earn money much faster and more easily than those in a subordinate capacity; often making three or four pounds a-week; though even at manual labour, it was observed of him "that he could do as much work with one hand as most men with two." His poor family did not benefit as they ought by this success; he spent all he got, or very nearly all, on himself;

and Ann had to go out reaping in harvest-time, and resort to all sorts of devices for a living at other times, like any poor labourer's wife. She was almost always in a state of poverty; pillow-lace was in little demand, and was never a very paying trade.

The part of Middlesex where they lived was chiefly meadow land, so that in order to reap she must go a long distance, setting out very early in the morning, and not getting back till long after nightfall. Jacob she usually took with her when she could get him from his father. Jacob was a hard-working, steady, patient boy, kind and feeling to his mother, and a great comfort to her; the other children she was perforce obliged to leave at home in charge of young Ann, or "Nan," as she was now generally called. Nan was a quick, clever girl—a mother in her way to the younger ones, but rather a severe one. She would see that they were clean and neat, but she abused the power delegated to her, by domineering over the rest, locking them up in "the back-house" for trifling

offences, or keeping them without the food their mother daily cut and portioned out before her departure, if they refused to obey her arbitrary commands. Susan and her brother Joseph avenged themselves in various small ways on their tyrant, as children will. By the time the second harvest after the great "move" from Buckinghamshire was ripe, another baby brother had appeared in the family, whom Isaac, making a leap in Biblical chronology, caused to be christened "Aaron," though he was commonly called "Dick." Dick being very small at the time of harvest, and of a very fretful disposition—no wonder, considering that he was deprived of his natural sustenance eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, and compelled for his only refreshment to suck a piece of sugar tied in muslin—required a great deal of nursing; and Nan, feeling a vocation for higher things than keeping a baby quiet, imposed the task on Susan and Joseph, chiefly on the former as being a girl, and in consideration that Joseph was little more than a baby himself,

and had twice fallen down with Dick, and once let him drop with his head upon the fender, to the serious injury of Dick's skull. Susan did her best, but she was only a little child; Dick was heavy for her arms, and to be constantly encumbered by an infant was irksome. She remembered how Jacob had danced her on his knees in her own infancy, shaking her harder, and jumping her higher the more she cried; and naturally inferring that this was orthodox nursing for infants, she shook Dick up and down, bumping him on her lap with persevering energy. One day Dick was undergoing this discipline, and playing with his sister's thimble at the same time; suddenly he struggled, gasped, and grew black in the face, collapsing in his nurse's arms. The thimble had disappeared. Susan, white with terror, with a presence of mind sometimes shown by cottage children—seldom by others when so young—put her hand into her brother's throat and dragged out the thimble, just in time to save Dick's life. If guardian angels watch over the children of the

poor, their post must certainly be no sinecure! To "spite" Nan for inflicting such a wearisome charge on them so often, Susan and Joseph would play her various tricks, such as gathering all the damsons, when green, from a tree which was their sister's great delight—forgetful that by so doing, they, as happens in most cases of revenge, also "spited" themselves—burying the fruit in a hole in the ground. Yet, on the whole, the children were kind and good to one another; Ann was the least so; and it was at length discovered that the important avocation for which she neglected the baby was making dolls, or otherwise amusing herself. Let childhood have fresh air, a moderate allowance of food, if only bread and butter,—which was the little Askews' allowance half their time;—let it have these, no great unkindness, liberty, and dirt-pies, and it will not be without enjoyment.

In whatever distress Ann and her children might be, Isaac threatened fearful vengeance if his wife ever dared ask succour of any human being. He did not mind her going to his own

father's; and many a home-baked quartern Ann has gratefully brought from thence; but any application to her own home was strictly forbidden. Yet Ann, in secret defiance of this prohibition—she was not quite such a passive slave to Isaac as she had been—contrived, some two or three times in a year perhaps, to make a pilgrimage on foot to the home of her childhood, where she was always kindly received. She was obliged to go and return in one day, setting out at a very early hour in the morning, and getting back at night before her husband came in—he was generally late—as she dared not risk his knowing where she had been. These expeditions were usually made when the poor creature was terribly "hard up." It was no joke to walk a distance of fourteen or fifteen miles, sometimes burdened with a young infant, —which she took to give the other children, as she said, a holiday,—and after a short rest—it was obliged to be short—return again by the same weary road, always laden heavily—that was the great point of the journey—with pro-

visions of all sorts. She was still young and strong; she often boasted she could carry a sack of flour; and the joints of Crow's Nest pork, the loaves, the solid puddings, and, above all, the potatoes that she would bring forth on her return to Ryefields, seemed to the astonished children as if their mother were a wizard, producing articles in impossible quantities by conjuring tricks, or else that the things themselves were but an optical delusion; though the youthful Askews were not long in ascertaining, by means of more senses than one, that the pudding, at least, was substantial enough. Often, incapable of dragging her load all the way, she would leave behind for a time one of her precious bags of potatoes, her favourite hiding-place for it being a corner by the wall of a ruined old house, called Moorlands, from whence she could fetch it in the morning. If "three removes are as bad as a fire," according to the old adage, the Askew family must, in a figurative sense, have several times been burnt out of house and home. Before long, they left

Ryefields for a house on the Green, in Ickenworth parish, called Berner's Wood. Here Ann assisted an old woman, called Betty Hopping, in washing, and on Betty's death succeeded her in the business. This house they left after a time, because one morning a dead man was discovered lying at the threshold of the back-door. His dying groans had been heard in the night by two of the children, and a post-mortem showed that his death must have resulted from starvation, his stomach containing nothing but the blossoms of the common hazel, generally called "catkins." His blackened short pipe was filled with leaves; he had on good clothes; nobody claimed him: he was supposed to be an unfortunate lunatic, escaped from some asylum, who had wandered about until he sunk down exhausted. This melancholy occurrence so shocked and frightened the children, and in some degree, probably, Ann herself, some phases in whose early life had predisposed her to superstitious fears, that it was impossible to stay.

So the family went back into Ryefields parish,

to a cottage on the borders of the two parishes, near a public-house, called the "Brown Bear," some distance from old Askew's; and at last became stationary. Ann retained her washing, and got more; combining with that drudgery, occasional sick-nursing; thus earning money, and subsisting often on a minimum of food and sleep, for the sake of her children, whom she brought up to be clean and industrious, giving them what little schooling she could afford. Her girls went out to service when not more than eight years old; it was the best thing for them, she said, even if the places were hard. Tender-hearted as Ann was, she enforced submission from her children. When Susan ran home from her first situation, that of nursemaid to the wife of a gentleman's butler, who "cut the girl up and down stairs like a shuttlecock," Ann calmly said, "it was of no use coming complaining to her," and took her daughter back to beg her mistress's pardon. The boys soon earned something, which helped to feed and clothe them. Two more children

had completed the family, fine ruddy Saxon boys, who—their father at length abandoning Scripture nomenclature — were called respectively Alfred and Edward.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DAY OF RECKONING.

"Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon *him*, as true hearts cannot bear."—SHAKESPEARE.

YEARS passed on; Jacob was twenty-one, his mother still on the right side of forty. Things had gone on pretty much the same; Isaac still drank, Ann still toiled and struggled, standing hours and hours at her washtub, in her little steamy back-kitchen.

Perhaps, in her zeal to work, she was sometimes too neglectful of home comfort; she would scarcely spare time to sit down to a meal with her husband, which naturally irritated him; and when he was in a good-humour, she usually took the opportunity of "snubbing" him and reproaching him with his shortcomings, until he would swear, and perhaps leave the house.

When he was in a bad humour, which was very often (for the drink that he constantly imbibed rendered him headstrong and violent), he would visit on his wife the faults, real or imaginary, of all their children. On one occasion, when Dick was gone to a fair—although the boy had worked hard all day, and it was only nine o'clock—Isaac became so enraged against Ann, who, he said, brought up and encouraged the children in idleness and disobedience, that he drove her from her bed, to which the poor wearied creature had retired, and (himself undressed, and looking like a madman) pursued her across some fields, finally locking her out. She lay down, thinly clad as she was, "among the 'taters," as she expressed it, which grew green and tall at the bottom of the garden—a little dog, which always took the part of the ill-treated ones in the family, beside her. Many a time has poor "Charlie" forsaken his warm nook by the chimney-corner to pass the night out-of-doors with his mistress, and perhaps a son or daughter, whom his savage master had driven forth.

Here Ann lay until she heard Dick return; when, wrapping herself in an old sack that lay in the wood-house, she called to the boy, and, telling him what had passed, seated herself on the chopping-block, and cried—Dick crouching beside her, and Charlie at their feet, until Isaac went out to work the next morning. He had locked the front-door and taken the key, making all else, as he thought, secure first, with the amiable motive of keeping his family out. The younger boys were still asleep, too small to help themselves or others; but Ann lifting Dick up to a window which his father had luckily omitted to fasten, the boy crept in, and, unbolting the back-door, admitted his mother, who, rejoicing—simple soul!—at the defeat of Isaac's stratagem, declared it was a proof that "God was always above the Devil!"

This is merely a specimen of the "rows" that frequently happened. One time it was that, returning from an expedition to Crow's Nest, made for the sake of enjoying himself, Isaac took it into his head that a harmless next-

door neighbour whom he saw pass late at night —the man was going to London with a hay-cart—was a lover of his daughter's or his wife's who had been entertained in his house during his absence; and stormed and said the most unjust things of them both, whilst he sat eating the cherries he had brought with him—ending by driving them from the house. The daughters had more spirit than their mother; and the second one, on this occasion, made her mother walk with her and "Charlie" about the fields (when they got tired of the usual place of refuge, the wood-house), or sit down whilst the dog and girl had a game of play; and when, at two or three in the morning, Isaac, with unusual condescension, invited the wanderers in, by saying (with an oath between each word) what fools they were to stay out there, Susan—after he had gone growling off to bed—got her mother some tea, and they both had a quiet half-hour as they feasted on the cherries. Another time—wild with passion—Isaac stood over his wife for more than an hour, threatening to stab

her as she lay in her bed, she praying God all the while "to spare her from the hands of the wicked man"—repeating the Lord's Prayer over and over—until his rage turned upon himself, and, tearing open his shirt, he attempted to plunge the knife in his own heart instead of hers—crying, "Oh, God! keep me from doing murder!"—when Ann, with great difficulty, persuaded him to lie down and be quiet, and, sinking on the bed, the wretched man sighed and groaned away the night by her side.

Yet, notwithstanding his ill-usage and groundless jealousy, Isaac would not suffer any one else to breathe a word against "Nancy;" and —although often grieving and hurting her by levity and flirtations, as well as by his high praise of other women, whom he declared (to her) were greatly her superiors, and would have made him much happier had he married one of them—he was not unfaithful to his wife.

Ann's greatest consolation was her eldest son. Jacob, ever since he was sixteen, had been

earning man's wages, of which he regularly brought home eight shillings to his mother, to pay for his board and lodging. This happiness had its drawback; Isaac was furiously jealous of his wife's motherly fondness for her son. "She loved her son better than her husband," he said; "it was very cruel and wrong, She seemed more glad to see Jacob than himself; she took him more into her confidence." What wonder, indeed, if she did, Isaac's treatment of her considered? Though Ann, still in her heart, loved her husband better than any human being, and when by fits and starts he was kind and tender to her, all the early affection seemed to revive again.

Jacob bore, as few young men would have borne, his father's taunts and unkindness. He had a feeling heart, poor fellow! which was often wounded to the quick; he did all he could to please his father, or at least to avert his anger, and displayed wonderful command of temper when provoked. At length, however, came a crisis.

It was one Friday night, Ann had got well on with her work, and sat down for a little comfort; Susan, the second daughter, was at home, a fine rosy plump girl of sixteen; Isaac was in doors, and Ann had prepared a nice hot supper of bacon and fried onions; Jacob had not yet returned from work, and Ann saved a portion of the savoury viands for her eldest son, which she set beside the fire to keep hot. Isaac, always greedy—he would often devour a whole dishful of beefsteaks, whilst his hungry children sat by eating their dry bread, Ann longing all the time that he should "give the poor things just a taste apiece"—and who grudged others their share, doubly grudged Jacob his, and was irritated at the care and thought this setting aside betokened. A dark cloud came over his face, and he broke out, swearing dreadfully, declaring that Ann was "fonder of Jacob than of any of them." The young sons and daughter sat by, silent and unhappy, feeling for their mother, who began to cry. The storm grew louder and heavier, Ann weeping and

protesting against her husband's injustice, until Jacob entered, and, going up to the table laid down eleven shillings with a look of honest pride, saying, "There's three shillings extra for you this week, mother," and then, seeing the disturbed countenances, asked quietly, "What's up now?" Isaac replied by swaggering up to him, his face livid with rage, and telling him to "leave the house."

"If he does," cried Ann, starting up, stung beyond bearing at this injustice, "I'll leave it too!"

Isaac glared upon her in mute astonishment, as she stood like a timid wild animal driven to bay by threatened peril to its cubs; while Jacob coolly said he was quite ready to go, and desired his sister to fetch down his things. Susan refused, saying, "It should not be said as it was she who helped send him out of the house."

Jacob, who had been sheep-shearing, took his bundle of implements from his shoulder, and deposited them on the brown table. His

uncle Abraham, recently deceased, had left him some carpenters' and other tools. "I shall take my share of these," said Jacob, and his father grimly assenting, the men commenced parting the tools, the women weeping and vainly remonstrating. They came to the tines of a broken hay-fork in the carpenter's basket: Isaac charged his son with having broken it; this Jacob denied, whereupon his father, with an oath, called him a liar. The pacific, patient Jacob, who seldom or never swore, was for once roused, and, repeating his father's oath, called him a —— old liar! This irritated Askew, and he struck his son a terrible blow on the head, which knocked him down senseless. Recovering, and staggering to his feet, Jacob then, breathing hard, the concentrated passion and resentment of a life's insult and injury rising up and causing him for the time to forget all filial duty, exclaimed as he clenched his fists,—"You have been asking me for this for the last five years, and I'm d——d if you shan't have it."

Thereupon father and son fought furiously, each drawing blood, the clock was broken, and all the little stock of china; the linen poor Ann had so laboriously "got up" was overthrown and scattered; Ann and her daughter watched the fray, shuddering, and crying to them to desist. The older man's flannel waistcoat was soaked through with blood, yet he made a good fight with his one arm; at length Jacob got him down, and inflicted a series of sledge-hammer-like blows, beating the breath nearly out of his antagonist's body. Isaac, in whom "pluck" was never deficient, and who in his extremity was not perhaps without a sense that this retribution was merited, cried out, with a mixture of agony, terror, and defiance, "Kill me!—kill me quite now you're at it." He was very nearly dead, when Susan, who had, not unnaturally, sympathised with her brother up to a certain point, ran to their nearest neighbour, Mr. Gower, the landlord of the "Brown Bear," screaming out in her bewilderment, "Oh, Mr. Gower, do come, father's a-killing Jacob!" Mr. Gower,

jumping out of bed and slipping on a few clothes, without staying to take off the flannel night-cap that was tied under his chin, came in, and exclaiming, "Why, d—— the girl, it's just the t'other way," with great difficulty dragged Jacob off his father, who seemed at first more dead than alive; Jacob, half-frenzied, declaring that "now he was worked up to it he did not care—either he would kill his father, or his father should kill him that night—he cared not which!" Indeed, life seemed to him little worth having; that of the author of his misery little worth sparing.

Again father and son fly at each other like wild beasts; good Mr. Gower cannot separate them, and narrowly escapes a broken head trying to do so. First one of the combatants is down, then the other; round after round is fought with unabated fury—Isaac, like Tom Sayers in later years, doing wonders with his one effective arm, while Jacob struck away with lusty youthful vigour; and Ann ran about like one distracted, wringing her hands, and, as her daughter after-

wards expressed it, "almost tearing her hair off her head."

At last Ann and Susan both ran out into the road, shrieking "Murder!" at the top of their voices.

It was the custom of Inspector Gough and three of the rural police of that district, to meet at midnight at a four-wont way (before continuing their several rounds), in one angle of which stood the "Brown Bear," the Askews' cottage being, as it were, under the shadow of the sign-post supporting the effigy of that remarkable animal. Fortunately the hour of midnight had just been droned forth by Ryefields church clock (always twenty minutes or more too slow), but, of course, the rural "Peelers" kept parochial time. Hearing female screams, all four policemen were quickly on the scene of action.

The father and son are separated now, and each is gasping and struggling in the arms of two policemen.

"What shall I do with them, Mrs. Askew?" asked Inspector Gough politely of Ann; "shall I

give one or both in charge, and have them locked up?"

"Oh no, no, don't lock 'em up, poor dear souls!" cried the distressed Ann, her wife and mother's instincts making her feel for the sufferings of both men.

"Take father," said Jacob; "neither mother nor sister will be safe, if you don't; he'll kill them for taking my part."

"Nay, if I take him, I must take you too," said the Inspector; whereupon Ann again implored him to take neither.

"You go, Jacob!" growled Isaac fiercely, and Jacob, finding there was no more fighting to be done, suffered himself to be led off into the yard, where he washed himself in a pail of water. He said to his sister who followed him, that he would never have lifted a hand against a parent (and he hoped God Almighty would forgive him for doing so) "had not his father 'most killed him first." Presently he re-appeared at the door, calling to his father gravely "if he had not had enough to come into the yard and fight it out,

and be friends again, that we may not," he said, "be bearing malice, and wishing to punch each other's heads every time we meet."

It being just the time when hay-carts were going out, many persons were about, and several collected round the house. All joined in desiring Jacob to be quiet, as it was evident he had half-killed his father; and one young man, who had some beer in a bottle, as provision on the road before the public-houses were open, tapped it, and shared it with Jacob, his sister, the policemen and others.

Jacob vowed solemnly, as he quitted the house, that he would never again sleep under that roof—nor did he; he told his wretched mother he would lie down in one of the barns belonging to Mr. Bray (a neighbour who did an extensive trade in faggots) for that night, and then get a lodging somewhere or other. It was sad to see the poor fellow thus driven forth, going with an aching yet a brave heart from his home. So his mother and sister think, yet they cannot also but think it a pitiful sight to see the "old man" as they

call him—though he is in the prime of his days—now that his passion is over, broken down with grief yet more than by physical suffering, which must be acute, for he is scarcely able to stand when he totters into the back-kitchen to wash his wounds, and his body is one mass of bruises and contusions.

"What an awful day!" he half sobbed; "I wish the blessed Lord would take me. But no—the blessed Lord can have nothing to do with me, or he would not suffer me to do such dreadful things. What a fool I am! God Almighty forgive me, and have mercy upon me!" He sat down on a heap of faggots in the backhouse, and for a long time cried like a child.

His remorse was as overwhelming, and as fearful to behold, as his passion. His faithful wife bathed and dressed his wounds, assisted him to bed, and brought him some nice hot tea; saying to her daughter in Isaac's excuse, "she believed it was the drink—not him—as had done it!"

The iron frame that could bear so much was crushed and prostrated now; for days Isaac was

unable to go to work, but lay like a log in his bed, suffering from the severe "punishment" administered by the hands of his son.

This had indeed been for Isaac a day of reckoning!

CHAPTER XX.

THE RISING GENERATION.

" His sons grow up that bear his name,
Some grow to honour, some to shame."—TENNYSON.

A FURTHER dispersion of the younger inhabitants of Crow's Nest had taken place during the last few years.

Will Howard had, after a long courtship, married a Miss Lucre—farmers' daughters were now beginning to affix "Miss" to their names. She was neither young nor handsome, but she was, in a pecuniary point of view, by no means unworthy her somewhat singular surname. She was an only child, and had for years kept house for her father, in a farm called after him, "Lucre's Farm." The couple resided with the old man, who died in about a year, bequeathing to his daughter silver teapots and other valuable

articles, and leaving her the farm and landed property for life.

Emma also married; her husband, Mark Pearson, was her first cousin, a grandson of Mr. Pearson of the Dell, where Ann had nursed the memorable Hannah Skinner. He was a broom-maker by trade, like his father and grandfather, and had not long been married to his meek, gentle-tempered wife, when he began to treat her ill.

Jane Howard was still in service at Notting Hill, a well-conducted, steady young woman, much liked by her employers.

Mary Howard went as servant in the family of a gentleman who had married a German lady, to whom he was devoted. They were rich, and somewhat eccentric. Mary had very much her own way. They were fond of her, and she had high wages, which she spent in dress. She was engaged to be married to a respectable young tradesman, whom she frequently met and went out with. The wedding-day was fixed. Her master and mistress, though sorry to part

with her, favoured the match. They proposed giving a dinner in their spacious kitchen to the bride and bridegroom, and some eight or ten relatives and friends. Large joints, turkeys, and fowls were ordered. The parties had been "out-asked in church," when the bridegroom elect was taken suddenly ill with an inflammatory attack, and died on the very morning of his intended wedding day!

This was a sad blow to Mary; she was nearly distracted, and mourned and lamented bitterly. Her good master and mistress said and did all they could to comfort her; she should stay with them at any rate for the present. Mary could not make up her mind what she would do. Three or four months passed. She continued to grieve—that was natural—but she was restless, wild, and unsettled to a degree that even her great loss scarcely seemed to warrant. About this time Mrs. Matthias, her mistress, received distressing news concerning some members of her family in Germany, and a strong desire seized her to return immediately to her native

land. This her indulgent husband gratified. They would not delay an hour longer than necessary. They were childless, and had plenty of money; so selecting the articles they most valued, to be sent after them, Mr. and Mrs. Matthias gave the remainder to their favourite servant. Mary thus unexpectedly found herself in possession of handsome furniture, curtains, carpets, and a great portion of her former master and mistress's wardrobes. The chief of these she converted into money, and then returned to Crow's Nest. Her mother soon discovered, and the circle of neighbours who formed their little world soon knew, the cause of Mary's additional trouble, for Mary had not been at home long before she gave birth to a child. Her parents were, of course, grieved and indignant. "First one, then the other on 'em brings us trouble," Howard said, "but this is the worst disgrace of all." After a time Mrs. Howard said, "One must make the best of what has happened; poor Mary has had a misfortune." The child, a fine girl, named Georgina, in memory of George,

its dead father, remained at Crow's Nest; Mary after a time returned to service, this time in the clergyman's family at Ickenworth. She was a good servant, but of a restless, unsettled, dissatisfied turn of mind. She found the rectory dull; there were few opportunities of showing herself off; the quiet country life did not suit her, so she left her place, intending to go to London, first making a stay of some length (self-invited) with her sister Ann, whose jealousy she excited by flirting in the most barefaced way with Isaac, her own brother-in-law! Mary "made herself at home" with a vengeance. She would, unasked, light the fire in the front kitchen, and make tea there, all snug for herself and Isaac, with whom she would sit sipping the refreshing beverage, talking, and, we are sorry to say, love-making, whilst the poor wife still stood at her wash-tub. Isaac openly avowed his liking for Mary. "She was the best of all the family," he said; "she had some spirit about her; he did not like flat, tame women." Ann often surprised the pair whispering together,

becoming suddenly silent and confused when they saw her: altogether a wrong state of things was going on. One day Ann burst in upon her faithless husband and deceitful sister as they sat near the tea-table, Mary in an arm-chair, Isaac bending over her. She could bear it no longer; she was holding a wet sheet she had been wringing, in her hands, and, her gentle temper at boiling-point, flourished this harmless weapon between them, crying, "By the God that made us, you shall not go on so; Mary, you go, if you can't behave better than this!"

Mary said, "Don't Ann," and cried. Isaac, getting over his first embarrassment, laughed loudly and rudely at his wife's grief; "What! jealous, old woman?" he said.

Mary soon after this went off to London, but her absence could not chase the painful impression. "I could have borne it better from anyone than my own sister," Ann said.

It has been mentioned that Ann's sister Sally, the one next to her in age, and the most associated with her early life, lived in the service

of a gentleman to whom one of her aunts was housekeeper. "Aunt Charlotte," as she was called, stood high in her master's favour. He was a bachelor; she had everything her own way, and Sally had a capital berth. At the time Ann left that part of the country, Sally was undecided whether to accept the proposal of marriage made her by the gardener, whose heart it seemed she had won. He was a man somewhat advanced in life, but possessed a comfortable cottage and some property, besides his excellent wages, which advantages he humbly besought Sally to come and share. Sally consented; her master and her aunt both gave her nice presents and clothes; she had everything new. A feast was prepared, the wedding-day arrived, but Sally was missing! Her heart failed her at the last moment, and, instead of being married, she ran home, and, arriving at Crow's Nest very early in the morning, before her parents were up, roused them by throwing handfuls of earth at the window. On being admitted, she burst into torrents of tears, and sobbed out that she

had changed her mind, and could not and would not have the gardener, who, she learned from a conversation she accidentally overheard between him and one of her fellow-servants, felt no real affection for her, but only sought her hand from interested motives, because she stood high in her employer's favour. After a brief stay under the parental roof, she went to London, and, having lived in one or two good situations as nurse, met, when on a visit to Crow's Nest, with a cousin who had been in France many years, where he had secured an excellent position connected with the railway, and now returned, as he said, determined to take back one of his cousins as his wife.

He was a man of strong will, and carried off the half-unwilling Sally, who, however, soon became warmly attached to him, and found him one of the best husbands who ever lived—giving her every comfort, and showing her great kindness; nor does she ever regret having escaped from the gardener.

Aunt Charlotte was also the heroine of a

little romance. About the time her niece Sally married, she became the mother of a boy, of whom her master was the father. This child—a fine little fellow—was brought up as a gentleman's son; and whilst he was still quite young, his aged father died, leaving Aunt Charlotte all his property for her life (unless she married again), and at her death it was to be her son's. House, garden, money, land, all were hers; and she rose high in the estimation of her family. Mrs. Howard was her favourite sister, and always a welcome guest. Whenever the Dame had a quarrel with her husband, she would fly into the yard, calling out, "Jem—Tom, put the horse into the shay-cart, and get ready to drive me. I am going over to Charlotte's."

And, true to her word, she would go, and remain with her sister, "living quite like a lady," for a period varying from a day to a month, according to the intensity of her anger or the seriousness of the quarrel.

Jem Howard was of a very independent dis-

position, ambitious to advance himself in life. He soon got tired of working with his father, and at eighteen became keeper to Lady Grantham, the same who had been so kind to Ann on more than one occasion. Not long after this, a woman, or, as she styled herself, a lady, came to be schoolmistress in the village. She was more than twice Jem's age, had lost all her teeth, and was very ugly, besides being marked with the small-pox, which aggravated the plainness of her features; but she had some money, dressed very smart in silks and flowers, and played on the pianoforte. Jem thought it would add greatly to his consequence to have such a stylish wife, who looked down upon most of the neighbours, treating the single men, especially, with great disdain. He was a handsome young fellow—he was determined to rise in the world; he paid his addresses to the schoolmistress. She received him doubtfully at first; this doubled his eagerness to be successful. He told her of a plan for his own aggrandisement which was

dimly floating in his mind; he would give up his post of keeper, and go to assist his father; the old man—he was getting old now—had hurt his leg, and could scarcely hobble about. Jem had devoted all his spare time for some weeks to the Crow's Nest concerns. He liked farming better than being a keeper; his father had as good as made him the offer to manage everything if he would, and then—then in time he should succeed his father. Why should he not? True, he was a younger son, but none of the elder ones wanted it; besides, his father only rented the farm and land; he had little doubt Mr. Howard would give up the farm to him, especially if he had a nice wife (here Jem winked knowingly at the schoolmistress), and retire into a smaller cottage—it would be much more comfortable for him, poor old man! now his family was so reduced; there were only Tom and little Georgey at home. The schoolmistress listened with greedy ears; the idea of reigning at Crow's Nest had great fascination for her. It was such a snug place—

might be made so much of by an enterprising young couple! She had already fallen into meditation as to where her piano should stand, and which room she should convert into the best parlour, when she was roused by Jem's saying, in tender tones, "What do you say to all this, my beauty?"

"*You* are a beauty, James," she answered, with her most seraphic smile.

It was the first time she had called the young man by his Christian name. James improved his opportunity; he "went in and won," and, within a month after that, had married the schoolmistress, thrown up his appointment of keeper, and was head-man at the farm, where he resided. He made desperate attempts to persuade his mother to allow his wife to reside at Crow's Nest also, but Mrs. Howard positively refused to let a stranger—"especially such a proud, stuck-up thing, with her peanny and her airs, who looked as if she thought them all dirt beneath her feet—come and live at the dear old farm!"—not she. So Jem had to divide

his time, as best he might, between his wife at the school-house, and his family at home. His wife by no means liked this arrangement; she was constantly urging on Jem to take a decided step. He had virtually the whole management of the farm. If Howard would not consent to give up, the thing must be brought about somehow—she would tell him how. He first started at the suggestion; then, by dint of thinking it over, it seemed less strange; by degrees it appeared justifiable—at least *almost*. He hesitated; the arch-tempter chimed in with the female tempter at his elbow. He would see—no, no, he could not do such a wicked, cruel thing. As he looked at the kind, confiding old man, his heart smote him. Then his mother's contempt and bitterness towards his wife exasperated him. Well, well, he would bide his time. But still, hour by hour, the resolve gathered strength.

About this time Will Howard lost his wife —Miss Lucre that had been—after having only been married to her three years. By her reck-

lessness and self-indulgence she had impoverished her husband and herself; she had sold the silver teapots and other articles at her disposal, and now fell a victim to her intemperate habits, regretted by none, and detested by her husband's family; so much so, that, notwithstanding her wealth, Mrs. Howard had never been even commonly civil to her; neither in the days of her courtship nor during her brief married life had she ever been asked in to Crow's Nest, or partaken of so much as a cup of tea there.

Mrs. Howard, as we have seen, was not a woman for half measures; she either hated entirely or loved entirely, and never made the slightest attempt to disguise her hatred or her love. "She despised such hypocrisy," she said. Lucre's farm, at Mrs. Lucre's death, as she had died without issue, descended to a male relative; and Will undertook the charge of a farm belonging to Mr. Hall, one of the largest landed proprietors in those parts, a sort of gentleman-farmer on an extensive scale. Being lonely, he invited his sister Mary to come

and keep his house, which she willingly did. Her daughter, Georgey, was now a girl of nine years old, a favourite at Crow's Nest, handy, and useful to "grandmother." One Harry Styles was courting Mary: he lived at Ickenworth, where Mary had met him when in service at the Rectory. He had shown his affection by being very kind to Georgey, keeping the child in frocks and shoes, which the unscrupulous Mary allowed; and now he came over frequently to see his lady-love. She gave him some encouragement, and held out hopes that she would marry him; but her object of interest was young Mr. Hall, a fine-looking fellow, of nineteen or twenty, who was often at Hall's farm, where she and her brother resided. In fact, Hall's farm was his property, his father having made it over to him, with the several hundred acres in high cultivation attached to it. A room was always kept for his exclusive use, and he came when he liked; sometimes being with his father, sometimes on another part of the old gentleman's property. Mary made

desperate love to young Mr. Hall, who, beyond being slightly flattered by her attentions and admiration, did not care the least about her. Will Howard was a great deal out at night, as he went to London to superintend the sale of hay and other farm-produce. In the daytime he was often resting himself, so that he had little opportunity of seeing what was going on, or of watching the game his sister was playing. Young Hall was fond of going to Crow's Nest; he liked to talk with Farmer Howard. Mary was sure to follow him up there, and her forward, enticing conduct excited the honest indignation of her young brother Tom. One day, in particular, when Ann, bringing her second daughter, Susan, now a pretty blooming girl of eighteen, had come over to Crow's Nest to spend a few days, Mr. Hall's sportive attentions to her niece drew forth Mary's jealousy in an extreme degree; she sat in the kitchen, and worried every one: the others were still outside. Mr. Hall wanted to see the stables, and Tom kept his favourite niece with him; they met so seldom, and were

more like brother and sister. Mary was spiteful; she would not go out, but sent messages to Mr. Hall, to "come in and taste mother's beautiful cowslip wine;" on hearing which, honest Tom repeatedly said, "Don't you go in, sir, without you like, now."

Mary prevailed on Mr. Hall to remain, and escort her home. Will was away that night; Mary was more forward, more insinuating, than ever. She was the tempter, not the tempted: whatever might come of it, whatever might be done wrong, was her fault, not the young lad's.

In the course of a few days Mary dismissed the faithful Harry Styles. "It was a shame to have humbugged him so long," he said. Half a year passed, and then Will one day brought home a young woman with him, and said, "This is my wife. You were all so set against my first one, that I've managed this second affair on the quiet, you see."

Mary "flew about," as she would have expressed it, very angry that Hall's Farm should have a new mistress; and Will soon intimated

to his sister that he no longer desired her company. So Mary wrote to her sister Jane to get her a place; and Jane wrote back word that a brother of her mistress wanted a cook, and would be happy to engage Mary. That she was Jane's sister was guarantee enough for her character and ability. So Mary, scarcely bidding his brother or his wife goodbye, set off for Notting Hill.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

"In order to be worthily happy, we must not concentrate our wants and wishes upon ourselves. We must in some way or other diffuse our minds over other minds—supposing, that is, that we have anything in the shape of mind to diffuse."—*Life by the Fireside.*

"I THINK as how that gal of yours must have been born lucky, Mrs. Askew," observed a neighbour one day to Ann.

"May be she is," Ann answered seriously. "They *do* tell me so, because of what happened the day as she was born. You know"—it is probable Betty Brown *did* know, as she had heard the story at least twenty times before—"You know when my Susan was born, as Isaac was a-going through the snow to fetch a doctor,

(which I did not mean to go to the expense of one, only I was so uncommon bad), he stumbled over something, leastways it tangled and twisted round his legs; the snow was pretty well knee-deep, and he stoops to pick it up, and what should it be but a gown-piece of beautiful stout gingham, brown, with red flowers; and so, in course, he brought it home and gave it me, and I had it made up, and wore it, and wore it, and have had no end of wear out of it—it's in the wash this week—and shall keep it as long as it hangs together, it's such a good 'un. And all the neighbours said to me, says they, 'That's a lucky child, because a present came at its birth.' Many's the time I've took her in her cradle out into the ripping field, where she'd lay as good as gold, Susan would; though the sun was so broiling hot, she was turned as brown as a berry, poor child! and I used to make her a little house of wheat-sheaves to shade her, which Jacob, who was her nurse, would not stay in; and however she screamed, I did not dare go to

her for fear of Isaac. And now see what a nice situation she's got, so young! and they trusts her, and makes so much on her, and gives her such nice presents and such good advice, which I hopes she'll follow." ("It's to be hoped so, indeed," threw in Betty Brown, whose own daughters had not turned out over well.) "She's a good girl," pursued Ann, "and never forgets her poor mother; and as I was a-telling you, her young missus was down here yesterday, with such beautiful presents for me; some tea and some butter and cabbages, and a nice piece of calico; and all, Mrs. Askew, says the dear lady, because we've such a respect for Susan."

"Mr. Gabriel, her master, is a good man," observed Betty, as she dived into her soap-suds —she had come to help Ann over an unusually heavy week's wash;—Ann did not indulge in assistance once in four years. "I lives in the parish, and have done these twenty year. He does a deal of good in the parish, and is not

hard and down on poor people for their faults, as some is, expecting us to be perfection, which we knows they ain't theirselves."

"And more nor that," said Ann, "he and all his dear family (bless 'em!), seems to think as us poor folk ain't none the worse for a little pleasure now and then, instead of all drudgery. One day last week, they invited me down to dinner with the servants; we had a beautiful hot joint, and ale, quite a feast, and then the young ladies had me up in the drawing-room, and played the piano, and sung to me, and I seemed as if I was in heaven along of the blessed angels. And it's all cause they are so fond of my Susan."

"Isaac goes to Mr. Gabriel's church, don't he?" asked Betty.

"Yes," answered Ann, "and I must say as Mr. Gabriel's preaching, or noticing him, or summut, have done him a deal of good. He doesn't get drunk sometimes not above once or twice a week (Friday nights, which

is club-nights, so no wonder,—and Saturdays, when he's got his money, which is natural). And he's several times given me a shilling out of his wages. Oh, he's so good and kind to what he used to be!"

It was true Isaac had improved of late. For the first time in his life, through the preaching and influence of good Mr. Gabriel, who, as well as his family, had talked seriously to him when he went over to see his daughter, religion had some power over his heart. No sudden change or extraordinary conversion took place, —his good friend, the clergyman, would have mistrusted any such unnatural demonstration; but his eyes had been opened to a large and comprehensive view of man's duties and solemn responsibilities, his relations to a higher and spiritual world; the bearing that our conduct here must have on our destiny hereafter; and Isaac's strong sense and powerful will made him grasp these truths, and endeavour, however feebly and imperfectly, to apply them. Still

he had fearful outbreaks, but a beacon had shone in upon his soul, and he could see and shudder at the quicksands of vice and passion, if he could not always avoid them.

It was with comfort and excusable pride that he reflected, on looking back at his past life, that faulty, wicked, as he had been in many respects—and he owned and bitterly repented his errors—he had always been honest. "Here I am," he would say to his boys; "God only knows how I have dragged through the world with only one arm; but I never had no disgrace of *that* sort—I never had a policeman's hand on my shoulder. Be honest, boys and girls both: if ever any one of you don't know what's your own, never you come to me, d—— you! for I won't shelter you under my roof. I'd be the death of you sooner; and mind you tell the truth, which I haven't always done, worse luck!" He would say, when sober, "What a fool I have been!" and would stop short in his violent passions and call aloud on God to forgive him, walking about in great

agitation. It will be seen by this that Isaac's christianity, like all else belonging to him, was of a very energetic character.

All his boys but one were good and steady.

Jacob married young, a pretty, respectable girl, in humble life, and he made an excellent husband. Unambitious, sober, and steady, he worked for her and himself and their two little children, avoiding all his father's faults, from which he had suffered, and had seen his mother suffer, so fearfully. After the fight, he and his father avoided each other for some time; until one day, meeting at a public-house, Isaac went up to his son and asked him to drink with him, speaking pleasantly and kindly; then invited him home, calling out to his wife, "Come, mother! Jacob wants a bit of supper." From that time father and son have never had an angry word, but are on the most amicable and friendly terms—Isaac declaring that "when he dies, Jacob shall have all he has got."

Ann the younger, also married early. She was not so fortunate in a helpmate as her brother;

but as her story is a romance in itself, it cannot be told here. She had much that was fine in her character, blended with a strong spice of the "old man," as her father was now termed.

Joseph, the second son, was the black sheep of the flock. Handsome and attractive, strongly resembling what his father had been in his youth, he broke the heart of a girl who was devoted to him, and then almost broke his mother's heart by going off to America without giving the slightest warning.

The younger boys worked for farmers and others in the neighbourhood, and assisted their mother with their earnings, in feeding and clothing them.

Now that her own affairs were more prosperous, Ann had again a painful impression concerning her parents and some of her brothers and sisters, and a letter, shortly afterwards, conveyed intelligence of events which will be related in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

CROW'S NEST HAS A NEW MASTER.

"This boy was the very staff of my age—my very prop."
SHAKESPEARE.

"WHAT's the matter? Bless my soul! What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Howard, one day when her husband entered the kitchen, looking pale, wild, and agitated, as she had never seen him before in her life. The poor old man could not speak at first. He staggered into a chair, like one who has received a stunning blow.

"Jem! Jem!" he gasped, at length.

"Jem—what of Jem?"

"He's been and taken the farm over my head," faltered Howard.

"The farm! Crow's Nest! What can you mean?" cried his wife, turning white.

"He's been to the landlord," pursued Howward, "and told him as I wished to give the farm up, and would he put *him* in instead. So Mr. Parker, of course, he said *he'd* no objection; and so its all signed and settled, and my lease is set aside, and a new one made, all accordin' to law, and—Oh, this is too bad to bear!" And leaning back in his arm-chair, the old man hid his face in his hands, and fairly sobbed like a child.

His wife said but little then; but she was ghastly white. "Villain!" was all that she ejaculated. Her usual volubility seemed to have forsaken her. "Perhaps it is not true," she said at last. "He couldn't be so wicked! He couldn't!"

It was only too true; the unprincipled young man had taken advantage of his father's confidence to turn against him. When asked how he could do so, he answered, with a sullen, down look, "that he'd done so for the best; father must move, and the sooner the better. His own wife had been kept away long enough."

Then Dame Howard nearly broke her heart with grief. "She wouldn't move; she would not," she said. "Leave Crow's Nest! It was ridiculous—simply impossible."

The farmer, after the first, bore his affliction meekly. He felt most for his wife, whose spirit rebelled more and more. "I can be very contented," he said to his son, with a nervous quiver of the lip; "but there's your mother; you must manage with your mother."

Then the young man's conscience would upbraid him, as he saw that old couple; the old man so meek and gentle, that, as some of his family often said of him, "he would lie down and let you tread upon him, if it would do you any good:" the hard-working, care-worn mother, whose violent, passionate, querulous grief, if not so touching, was more trying to bear. Even her much-enduring husband could not stand it. "Dang it! It's no use going on like that!" he would exclaim, after she had poured forth a torrent of invective and lamentation; and then off he would go, and

wander, aimlessly, round and round the fields, to be out of sight and hearing of her misery. Her misery! Was not his own as great? But the humble, unselfish soul did not think so. To leave that home, endeared by long years of association; of enjoyment, toil, repose, of some trials, doubtless, but much hope and peace; where his children had grown up around him—his children—ah! bitter thought! This son, so loved, so trusted, who now offers his father employment as a hired labourer on his own farm! What kindness! what condescension! Oh God! had it come to this? Let the crushing be complete; he would accept the offer; he must earn bread somehow for himself, his wife, and little Georgey. Tom, who had succeeded the treacherous Jem as keeper on Lady Grantham's estate, would live with them—honest, simple-hearted Tom. They had never thought so much of him as of the more showy and clever Jem; but now Tom "stuck to them," and pitied them: he undertook to pay the rent of the small cottage—a tiny place, with no upper story, that they

were going into—on condition of having a little sleeping-room there. Well, well—he, the farmer—farmer no longer—was old; he was not the first whose son had "turned against him." The patriarchs, great, good men—to begin at the beginning—had not their sons wrought them woe?

The day came when their goods must be moved from the farm into the cottage, which stood half-way between Crow's Nest and the Dell. This is the most trying time of all: the things are gone now, all packed off, except one low rocking-chair in the kitchen, in which the Dame sits. That is her favourite chair, with the patchwork cushion; all her babies have been nursed in that chair. She will not move, she says, nor quit Crow's Nest; and there she sits, in her bitter, proud, indignant grief; stern, defiant, though her heart is breaking fast. At last, they are obliged forcibly to remove her, chair and all. Ah! Dame, you have been harsh and hard in your time. That door which you once closed against your unhappy, perishing daughter, your

son now closes against you! Ann's tender heart will ache when she hears it;—those for whom you have felt least, feel most for you. The old woman cannot bear it; she flies off to "Sister Charlotte" for a month. The poor old man, he *must* bear it; there is no "cannot" for him. He must go to work on the fields once his. Georgey waits on him: she is a good girl, trim and handy; pretty, with large dark-blue eyes, an oval face, and a fair skin. She calls him "father," and Mrs. Howard "mother," unconscious as yet that she is the child of shame, and supposing Mary, fair-faced ruddy Tom, and the rest, to be her brothers and sisters. Her joyous smile of welcome is better than nothing when he comes home. He gets a pound a week; that ought to keep the little family comfortably. Tom boards himself. He is so much out by day and night in his duties as keeper, that this plan suits best; so he gets his meals in one place or another, just wherever he may happen to be: he never costs his father a farthing.

A month has passed; the Dame is come back;

the hard reality must be faced at last. Silent and sad, she goes about the cramped little cottage, tears often rising to her eyes.

She has not been at home—home! the word seems mockery now — more than a few days when the ne'er-do-well Mary appears, with a month-old baby in her arms. "Oh! Mary, have you been and disgraced yourself and us again?" her mother asks. Mary treats the matter in an off-hand, don't-care sort of way. "She has had another misfortune, that is all. The child is young Mr. Hall's." This she tells Mrs. Howard: she does not tell her that, owing to her ungenerous want of candour towards her sister, whom she did not inform of her state, Jane got into great trouble, and nearly lost her place, her mistress not unnaturally supposing her a party to the deception practised by Mary. Nor does Mary mention that, being dismissed in disgrace about three weeks before her confinement, she took nice lodgings for herself, writing to Mr. Hall for money, which he sent her, and that, not content with this, she went round to several

highly respectable friends of her sister, to whom the kind-hearted Jane had introduced her, and borrowed money from them in Jane's name, which Jane will have to work hard and stint herself to repay. Mrs. Howard's surprise and annoyance are great. The child is a cross little boy, always making use of a strong pair of lungs to cry very loud. "Oh dear!" said the Dame; "my nerves ain't so strong as they was; that child's noise goes right through my poor head. We can't have it here long."

But the old lady reckoned without her host; for next day Mary disappeared, leaving the baby behind her, but no address or word where she was gone! Thus were the aged, broken-down couple burdened with a second illegitimate child of their daughter's, without a single half-penny towards the support of either. Mrs. Howard wept and bemoaned herself bitterly; then she said, "It's not the poor thing's fault. I can't turn it away, or let it starve." So she resumed her long-unaccustomed office of nurse, feeding and tending the infant, which was far

more troublesome than any of her own had been. Twenty times in the night would the child wake her by its shrill cries for food; twenty times in the night would its old grandmother leave her bed to give it milk and water, gruel, or arrowroot, from a bottle. Her husband's rest was broken. In the morning he was so ill and exhausted he could scarcely crawl to his work; and his work now was hard toil, not mere superintendence, and just doing what he liked. "I can't bear this," he said. "It's all along of your having that child, Polly. And milk is very expensive, now we have to buy every drop, and it wants such a deal. Mary ought to support her own brats, and that's all about it."

"But she won't," whined Mrs. Howard, as with weak, trembling hands she put on the infant's clothes, and then repeated her assertions about "it's not being the child's fault, and that it couldn't be left to starve."

"That ought to be Mary's look-out," said Howard, fretful and feeble from a succession of

bad nights. "You didn't ought to have encouraged her, you didn't. I can recollect the time as you wasn't so over tender to another and *her* infant, though she was honestly married, and had slaved for us for years, which Mary ain't fit to come along side of her, nor never will be!"

This unusually-long and most unwontedly-reproachful speech from the farmer—let us call him so still—silenced his wife for the moment; whilst a flood of tenderness and regret poured over the old man's heart as he thought of Ann, the good, the unselfish, the beautiful, who had worked for them unceasingly without a murmur, yet always looked bright and lovely; whilst the idle, selfish Mary never did a hand's turn in her life if she could help it—Ann, now so far away—at least it seemed far to his simple mind: his blood boiled as he thought of his wife's deep injustice, and he wished—oh, how he wished!—he had been firmer with her where Ann was concerned, in bygone days. It is no use wishing now; it is too late. Too late! that saddest

phrase in life's vocabulary! Did a human being ever grow to thoughtful manhood or womanhood without mourning over some "too late"? The farmer has little to reproach himself with in his past life, except that he has been too easy, too goodnatured: amiable failings, but still failings; it is not selfishness or cruelty alone that works ill in this world.

That the old man may get the rest which is so vital to him, he shares Tom's room; peaceably giving up his own as a nursery. His ill-humour —if it could be called by so harsh a name—did not last long: he toils on, uncomplaining. Sometimes he thinks he shall not work at "the old place" long. Everything at Crow's Nest is going to fearful rack and ruin under the new master, and especially the new mistress. Mrs. Jem, or, as she chooses to be called, Mrs. James Howard, is a most shiftless creature. Though she can play the piano, she cannot cook a "bit of dinner;" though she can dress smart, she can neither wash nor iron; though she can do a little embroidery, she cannot cut up a pig or

salt the meat, or make bread or butter. She does not even know how to feed the poultry. She buys extravagant articles of dress to deck her frightful person. She cannot save or earn a penny; but she can spend pounds. Of course, under such misrule, or rather no rule at all, everything went to the bad; waste, loss, disaster, followed such neglect. Jem was soon selling his crops at fearful disadvantage, cutting his ricks of newly-made hay, or parting with it before it had been even stacked; disposing of his corn anyhow; making bad exchanges of cattle, to raise money for present emergencies. At last he told his father he could not afford to keep him, or pay him: "he must do with fewer labourers, and they must be young ones." So the old man was cast adrift — to begin life anew at seventy!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"And what 's to come of my despised time is nought but bitterness."—OTHELLO.

THINGS went worse and worse with the old couple. Howard got labourer's work at Hall's farm, but he only earned twelve shillings a week, which was little enough to keep a family used to every comfort. Mrs. Howard spent so much of this on the children, especially on the infant, that Howard was almost starved. At last he said he could not work on such low diet —he must have a little beer and a morsel of meat, or he should die. Mrs. Howard felt the force of this; finally it was settled that Howard should give his wife six shillings weekly —that is, half of his earnings—to keep herself

and the children, retaining the other six for himself to buy food. Thus the old couple, who had never been parted for any length of time in their lives—who had lived, upon the whole, in the greatest harmony—now had not only separate rooms, but "separate cupboards." They loved each other not less for this, no unkind words passed; or if misfortune and suffering occasionally drew forth a hasty, peevish expression, it came not from their hearts. The world in general knew not but that the aged pair were passing their last days in comfort. There was a calm dignity about both, which forbade complaints or exposure of their circumstances to those around. The Dame was as neat as ever; who could tell that she was empty and sinking for want of proper nourishment? she was thin and pale, but how many old people are so! The old man's back was more bent than of yore, his gait more faltering, but was he not going rapidly down the hill of life? The children looked fat and well; the baby's new milk was regularly fetched and paid for at the farm

twice a day; how could the Howards' poverty be suspected?

No tidings of Mary all this time, and her youngest child was a year and a-half old. The selfish creature, though, as it afterwards proved, in a good situation, never sent a sixpence to help her parents keep her children. Jane, out of her earnings, sent her mother a beautiful warm shawl, for which she had given two guineas. The old lady showed it with pride and pleasure. It assisted her in keeping up a respectable appearance, and the sight of it often consoled her when the gnawings of hunger preyed on her feeble frame. Many, less decent, and differently brought up, would have pawned or sold such an article of luxury, as well as some of the copper-saucepans, nice feather-beds, and other remains of former greatness with which the little hut was almost crowded, to put the proceeds into their starving stomachs; but such an idea never entered Dame Howard's head. If she and hers had not enough to support them in the ordinary way—namely, by the

incoming money—they must do without, that was all. The indolent, helpless Mrs. James Howard sent all her washing down to her mother-in-law's cottage, and the old Dame, who had been brought up to work and thought work no disgrace, did it for her, accepting in return a loaf or a small piece of home-killed meat—very insufficient remuneration; indeed, often, Mrs. Jem made no acknowledgment, and the Dame was too proud to ask for any; but she was so poor that she washed for the Crow's Nest people week after week, in the hope of even this small occasional aid. This heavy and undue labour contributed to wear her down; she wasted to a shadow, but still did not murmur—not so much as she had murmured at trifles in the days of her prosperity. Want, sharp and pressing, which Ann knew long ago—her mother knows it now. Ann's tender heart yearned towards her parents; she felt deeply indignant at their being turned out of Crow's Nest, but she little dreamed of their extreme destitution, or at any sacrifice she would have sent them some-

thing. She got a slight glimmering of the truth when her mother, on one occasion, came up to see her, shortly before the birth of one of the younger Ann's children; the young woman expressing a strong wish that her kind grandmother should be with her. Mrs. Howard was to be at her daughter's in readiness for the expected event, as the granddaughter could not accommodate her with a sleeping-room.

Tom brought her up, both walking; the poor old woman was so knocked-up that she stopped at the village of Ickenworth for the first night, sleeping at a cottage, and calling to see Susan Askew at the Rectory, where she was invited to stay supper—all the family admiring the neat, old-fashioned dame,—her wrinkled face surrounded by a cap of dazzling whiteness, her small, upright figure clad in trim lavender dress, with short waist, and folded kerchief,—and enjoying her quaint sayings and strong "Bucks" accent.

Ann strained every nerve to make her mother comfortable, and Mrs. Howard rejoiced at

first in the "beautiful cups of tea," which she said were such a treat to her; whence Ann argued that she had not so many comforts as she ought; but Isaac did not second his wife, and after a few days swore at and used bad words to the old lady, grudging her all she had, which was but little, and refusing any longer to make room for her by sharing the boys' apartment. How different—Ann thought, bitterly—from his treatment of her sister Mary, whom he would do anything to accommodate, taking her out and buying her beer and nice things! One night the poor old soul slept on a heap of rags on the floor, and was so reduced in strength from "roughing it" and worry, that she cried to Ann's youngest boy, "Take this penny, Ted, and buy me half-a-pint of beer, or I shall drop down dead—I am that awful weak!"

It was her last penny, and the poor creature was anxious to depart; she longed to be once more at home, where she would at least have peace and quietness, and she set off without being able to nurse her granddaughter.

John, the eldest son, who had four children, was now in a rapid consumption. All his family grieved for him—with the exception of that one cruel act towards his father he had been irreproachable—now he is about to leave his wife a widow and his children fatherless. No luxuries for him now from Crow's Nest—no chickens, or eggs, or fresh cream, or young vegetables, as in sickness were his in his father's time. Jem gives nothing to any one; in fact, he continues to manage so ill that he has little to give, little even for himself or his odious wife.

Emma, the young Mrs. Pearson, is also in trouble and want. She is the mother of four children; her husband—angry because she will not remain with his mother, who keeps a small public-house—so public that Emma had no sitting-room, no place even to dress her children or have her meals in but the tap-room, full of noisy men all day and half the night—angry at her insisting on moving into a little cottage—deserts her, and taking the eldest child, a boy, with him, returns to the public-house, allowing

Emma six shillings a week to pay her rent (which took a third of the sum) and keep herself and her other three children! No help for her either, from Crow's Nest! Her father, her mother, fain would assist her, but they cannot now help any of their offspring who are in trouble—there was a time when they could, yet would not!

Jem got more and more embarrassed; he could not pay his way—nothing was coming in. His first year's crops had been prematurely sold; his second were badly got in, owing to want of capital; great part was spoiled in consequence, and, in rather more than a year and a-half after he had so iniquitously taken possession of the farm, he was obliged to throw it up, and ignominiously decamp with his fine wife to a distant village—Crow's Nest passing into the occupation of a stranger.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE END.

"The truth came home with bier and pall,
I felt it when I sorrowed most,
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."—TENNYSON.

ABOUT six months after Jem left Crow's Nest, Ann got a letter from her brother Tom, saying she must come directly, if she wished to see her mother again alive. It was Saturday morning; Ann must complete her washing and ironing, and send or take the clothes home to her customers, before she set out: however her heart might ache, that was an imperative necessity. She toiled away with feverish anxiety to finish: she has got to the last basket, and takes it to the Rectory where Susan lives; she can speak to her "gal" and go on from thence, as it is all in the

way. Susan always has a kind word for her mother. She has not told Isaac, he might be angry; she has left the letter with Ted to show him.

But she misjudged Isaac this time, for that evening he, too, came down to Susan and spoke very feelingly. "If she'd a come to me at the farm where I be working," he said, "I'd ha' got off an hour earlier, and have walked three parts of the way with her." And on Susan's saying her mother was so agitated she hardly knew what she was about, he exclaimed, "Poor soul, poor soul! I wish I'd been a bit kinder to poor old Wall-eye (his nickname for his mother-in-law); but my wicked tempers got the better of me; God forgive me that and all my other sins! I hope." And to see Isaac at that and at similar moments, any one—not knowing his antecedents—might vow that he was and had always been as gentle as a lamb, and as harmless as a dove; with a rare combination of good feeling and superior sense added to these more insipid virtues.

It was five o'clock when Ann left her daughter and was fairly on her road: the short winter day was fast closing in. On she trudged, in the cold and darkness, making all the haste she could. It was late when she reached Hedgebury, the village where her brother John lived, only three or four miles short of the Dell. She would stay but a moment, just to hear the latest news.

There she learned that her mother was dead; she had died about noon that day. Ann thought, "If I could but have seen her, though only for one minute." John's wife spoke kindly to her, and tried to soothe her grief. "It's no use your going on there to-night, Ann," said her sister-in-law; "you had better sleep here, and go on in the morning." So Ann passed the night at her brother's; it cannot be said that she slept, for she lay awake thinking of her mother and of the past, and listening to poor John's fearful hollow cough—heard distinctly through the thin wall—which told plainly as a knell that his days were numbered.

Tom had sent for Mary (whose whereabouts

they had lately discovered), when his mother's state was hopeless, to "take to her children." She had been with the old Dame in her last hours, and she and Tom met Ann at the door. "Father," they said, "had lain almost insensible all the first day of his loss; he was scarcely himself now." Ann went up to him where he sat, or rather crouched in the old rocking-chair by his fireless hearth. How changed was he in these two years! Thin, worn, faded, bent almost double, he seemed like the shadow of what he had been when Ann last saw him. "Ah, she's gone, my dear!" he faltered, with a slight gesture of his hand towards the next room, where the poor Dame's corpse was lying; "and the old man will not be long arter her. I be glad to see you, Nancy," he added presently, looking with wistful affection in his daughter's face; "but I should have been gladder, if—if—"

He broke down. "Go and see her now, my dear!"

Ann went, not closing the door; she could hear the old man's sobs; she was shocked to see the

extreme emaciation of the dead woman. "Poor dear mother!" she sighed, while her tears fell like rain—all but her mother's virtues and kindness forgotten in that hour—"Poor dear mother! God forgive me if I haven't done my duty by you! Poor dear, poor dear!" And kissing the cold lips, she returned to the living.

Was it shame that had made Mary slip out of the cottage into the little garden, where she stood weeping? Honest Tom, with a sad face, leaned against the doorway.

Ann bent over the old man.

"What did she die of, father—father? Was it"—as he wept and replied not—"was it of a broken heart?"

"Ay, partly, child," said the old man, lifting up his face at last—"partly. But Nance, to tell you the truth, I believe, on my soul, as the principal cause was—starvation!"

Ann turned as white as the corpse she had just quitted.

"Oh, father, father!" she could only gasp. "And you?"

"You see, my dear," pursued Howard, "as she pinched, and pinched, and pinched herself for those childer—Mary's; and she was old, my dear, and used to a plenty."

"Oh God!—and you?" Ann repeated.

"I'm pretty near as bad. There, don't say nothing about it, Nancy. Bless you, my gal, for coming: it's a sorry welcome for you. It ain't much as this house affords," he added, with a melancholy glance round; "but I've got two-pence, if you'd like a drink of beer. Georgey 'll fetch it."

Georgey, her cheeks purple and glazed with crying, came forward, rubbing her face with her pinafore. Poor Georgey! she and the fat baby brother who is toddling about with the aid of the chairs, stopping occasionally to stare, with wide-opened eyes, at Ann—have been the unconscious cause of that poor old woman's death. Ann can scarcely bear the sight of them.

"No beer for me, not a drop," she says hastily; "besides, I have a little money. Take it, father, do, poor dear!"

"I wish you'd have some beer, Nancy. I mostly takes water-sop, myself"—crumb of bread soaked in hot water, with a little salt to it, and perhaps the smallest bit of butter and a few grains of pepper on extraordinary occasions (we mention this for the benefit of those who may not have heard of water-sop)—"I can't touch no beer; I've been very queer lately—very queer indeed. What does me most good, is the least drop o' gin; you knows as I never was much of a man for drink, Nancy. But I can't afford a drop once in a month."

"You shall have a little, father," said Ann eagerly. "Don't eat the water-sop to-day. Let me buy you a morsel of meat for your dinner. And I must get you a bit of firing: it's so bad for you to sit here in the cold."

"I couldn't eat," said poor Howard; "my heart is too full, when I thinks of her a-lying there. She was a good partner, Nancy. We've had a good long spell of it together—more nor six-and-forty years—and John's a-dying, and Emma in trouble."

Emma now came in, her large eyes tearful. She reminds Ann of Charlotte: she has a patient, suffering air. Starvation seems doing its fell work upon her, too. She looks a worn, broken-hearted thing, though only twenty-six. But people may survive broken hearts; they cannot long survive the absence of bread and meat! Emma and her children had each had a small bit of bread and lard that day, though; so that their diet was comparatively speaking luxurious, and—when half a pint of beer was added by Ann—it might be called "high!" Indeed, as Emma assured her sister, the drink quite got into her poor head, and made her uncertain whether she stood upon that part of her person or her heels.

In the course of the day Ann visited Emma's miserable little abode, decently furnished, but bare and empty of every comfort, with a broken floor. The chimney, too, smoked furiously. "Sometimes that *do* provoke me," said Emma, taking her sister into all her little confidences, "when there's the least bit of fire we're forced

to have door and window open, let it be ever so bleak, which it 'most always is on this common, and the snow 'll drift in, or block up the door. And, Nancy dear, I am so wicked: I be often afraid as the blessed Lord 'll never forgive me, for now and then, when it do smoke so very bad, I says, 'domm the house!' But I don't mean it, Nancy—I don't; and I be always so sorry arterwards."

"Mark 's a bad husband, Emma," said Ann, "to behave to you like this."

"Ah! well, poor Mark!" Emma answered, with a sigh and a slight shake of the head; "he's a deal to put up with, and I never abuses him or blows him up so long as he comes home now and then."

Ann must return to her work next day, but will come to the funeral, which was fixed for the following Sunday. Her sister Jane, who came down on the Monday, paid for Ann's expenses by railway, which saved her much walking—though it was full seven miles to the nearest station—and she announced her safe return to

her daughter Susan, at eleven o'clock that evening. This was the first time in her life Ann had ever been in a train, and, notwithstanding her depression of spirits, she experienced no little wonder and excitement at so great an event.

On the day of the funeral, Ann, with Isaac, who was also to attend it, set out at five in the morning; but on reaching Howard's cottage found, to her grief and disappointment, that the funeral procession had started an hour before! William's wife, who was keeping house, seeing that Ann was half dead with fatigue and emotion —she had not broken her fast that day—insisted on boiling her an egg, which Ann would scarcely stay to eat, but tore off to the church, nearly four miles distant, which she reached just in time to meet the mourners leaving the churchyard, the ceremony over. Ann was hurt and vexed, after coming so far: it was the last thing she could do for her poor mother, and Miss Gabriel, Susan's "young missus," had given her such a handsome black bonnet, too!

It was a comfort to know that the funeral had been conducted in a style more befitting the Dame's earlier than her later position. Jane had borne the bulk of the expense. Ann had given what she could, and the others had subscribed a little, and were all present, excepting Jem, who neither came nor sent, though he had been more than once written to. Even the dying John was there, feebler from disease than his aged trembling father, though the brightness of his eye and cheek —that cruel, treacherous brightness—almost recalled to Ann the beautiful boy-brother of her youth. There they all are, gathered into the small hut that will scarce contain them: even the youngest are men and women now, with their several burdens of care and hidden sorrow, their interests, and hopes, and fears; all united—except one, the traitor—in the wish to pay the last honours to her who bore them. The old man, who seems like a pale ghost in the midst, holds the hand of Ann, his dearest, his first-born. It must not be for long, for Ann and Isaac have

to return home on foot that night; they must quit that party, which will never be all assembled together again until they stand before the "great white throne!"

Mary had been softened for the moment, but her old selfishness flowed in again like a tide. Her mother, when she found her death drawing near, said, in Mary's hearing, that she wished Emma to have her favourite shawl, Jane's present; indeed she told Emma to take it then, but Emma would not: "it seemed hard to take the shawl when mother lay ill." She thought "that Mary would let her have it;" but Mary would not, and the poor creature, who knew that Mary had plenty of good things of her own, was hurt and disappointed to a degree that it would be difficult for happy, well-off people to imagine. Its warmth, its beauty, its value, its bequeathal to her by her mother, made the shawl in her eyes an object of no small importance.

Mary went to the elder Mr. Hall with her child, tĕlling him it was his son's, and asking him

to give her some money towards its maintenance, and thus avoid the shame of an exposure. But the hearty, straight-forward old gentleman declared that he would not screen his son's faults more than those of any one else. If his son did wrong, he must pay for it, and ought to feel ashamed; though Mary ought to be the most ashamed of the two, being so much the oldest.

So Mary went before the bench of magistrates, amongst whom was Mr. Hall, who assisted, Brutus-like, in doing justice upon his own son, and young Hall was sentenced to pay half-a-crown a-week towards the maintenance of little Jack—a mere trifle to the young gentleman, but of importance to Jack and his mother, who placed him with a person to nurse, while Jem, who lived on the other side of London, sent for Georgey to be servant to his wife and children.

Ann had not returned home more than a fortnight when she got a message from her father to the effect that he longed, beyond all expression,

to see her once more with his favourite grandchildren, Jacob and Susan, more especially the former, whom he had not seen for twenty years —not since Jacob was a small boy: in the midst of his grief on that sad day of his wife's funeral, Ann remembered that he had whispered, "Bring Jacob; let me see Jacob." She could not refuse, especially as Susan's mistress entered warmly into the idea, subscribing towards a chaise to take them all down, and sent small but suitable presents to each of the family, in whom, through Susan, she had learned to take an interest. So off they set one fine clear morning, when the snow lay brilliant and crisp in the wintry sunshine, Isaac, and Jacob's wife being of the party.

One bright gleam for the poor old man, before, like a tired labourer in the world's field, he sinks to his rest. You are right, Ann, not to delay; time may be short with the young—must be with the old. Howard cries with joy to see these dear ones—his beloved Nancy, her husband,

and that fine young man and woman, her son and daughter; also the pretty, good little soul, Jacob's wife. One long day of quiet, chastened pleasure in that dreary, desolate home—one day of plenty and comfort—one day of kind and loving looks and words!

The old man feels as if he lived again in Susan and Jacob: they are good and tender to their grandfather, who is respected and made much of by all, including Isaac—who, except being quarrelsome and "cantankerous" in going and returning, is on his best behaviour. Howard is charmed with Jacob's young wife. It is a bright day for him. The flame of life has leaped up in its socket; he looks almost as he did years ago—almost; his brown hair, faded but soft still, as if its colour had been washed fainter but not out, falls over the collar of his coat—the snuff-coloured one at last exchanged for black; his blue eyes are bright, and the clear streaky red his cheek used to wear is imitated by that flush of excitement: he is still pleasing to look at, clean and neat as in his

best days; his daughter Jane has seen that his mourning is handsome and complete in every item, down to the black stockings, visible to the knee after the fashion of his youth. Yes, for this one day the old man is happy.

It is time for the visitors to depart; again and again he bids them farewell, saying, "Bless you all! I may never see you again; good bye, dears—bless you, dears, bless you!" All long remember him as he leaned on the little gate-post, weeping and hanging down his head as they are preparing to start on their moonlight drive home.

He returns to his hearth, and looks wistfully round at the places they have occupied. No one is there now but Mary: the hearth is warm, however, for Ann has "stood" a good supply of fuel, both for him and Emma,who has had her full share in the pleasures of the day; he has had something hot and comfortable, better than the "water-sop" or "kettle-broth." He will not to-night walk for weary hours about his room in the cold, as he has many and many a

night that winter, unable to lie down for pain and restlessness.

Ten days after, while carrying home a bundle of wood which he had picked up for his fire, he fell down repeatedly; he cannot think what ails him. Mary, who was still staying at her father's, seeing his exhausted state, by way of a treat, gave him one of the pancakes she had been making for herself. It is the last meal he ever partakes of. That night he is seized with a violent inflammatory attack; for three days and nights his screams of agony are unceasing. Then all is over; the weak frail body has returned to kindred dust—the gentle, generous spirit to God who gave it.

Could Ann, as she weeps over his grave, look on into the future—the future of the next few years—what would she see? She would see not only John, but her sister Emma, worn out with grief and want, following the old man to the land of shadows, with a very brief interval. Emma's end was a sad one; she had retired to

rest, apparently in fair health, with her three little children, and had risen early (as it was supposed, to say her prayers), for she was found in a kneeling position by the neighbours, who broke open the house-door late in the day, her two eldest children clinging round her, and trying to lift up their dead mother, who, they said, *would* stay out of bed so long. Ann would see Mary, reckless as ever, the mother of a third and fourth illegitimate child; the father of the last being Mark Pearson, Emma's husband, with whom she lives for a year or two, but who, getting tired of her, treats her as badly as he had her sister, so that all through a long severe winter she has only little Jack's half-crown a-week to keep herself and him; Mark now threatens to take another wife and discard Mary, who, driven to despair by misery and remorse, is on the verge of suicide. Ann would see the old Askews ending their days peaceably in a house given to the old lady by her son for her life—she is living still—the grandfather riding

about on a well-groomed lively donkey, which carries his light weight with perfect ease. She would see her old lover, James Dancer, still prosperous, still single, with a void in the heart that can never, until it stops beating, cease to be devoted to her. She would see herself stretched on a bed of sickness near unto death, broken down prematurely by severe labour and hard trials; raised up almost as by a miracle. She would see her daughter Susan higher and higher in the esteem of her employers; good Mr. and Mrs. Gabriel are dead, but she follows the fortunes of their son and daughter, to the end of the world, if they will; she would see that through this good daughter some happy days, some sights and scenes which make her think she is in heaven, "along of the blessed angels," are in store for her. She would see her long-lost son, Joseph, at last restored to her, humbled and reformed by suffering and the world's hard usage; with a considerable sum of money, a large black beard, and a strong Yankee accent; whilst

she would see, finally, that her husband, for whom and with whom she has borne and suffered so much, is kinder, gentler to her than of yore. She would see herself blessing God that, in spite of all, their union has been sanctified by what alone can make the marriage-tie holy—love: she would see herself pressing on humbly and cheerfully along the high road of existence, hoping, when life's journey is over, to join those she has loved, in a brighter and happier world.

THE END.

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